

MAKERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

THE MEDICIS

A Ruling Dynasty



HEATHER LEHR WAGNER

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MAKERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

The Medicis

A Ruling Dynasty

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The Medicis

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The Medicis

A Ruling Dynasty

Heather Lehr Wagner

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COVER: Lorenzo de' Medici "The Magnificent," among the artists, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy.

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LAYOUT 21st Century Publishing and Communications, Inc.

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First Printing

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wagner, Heather Lehr.

The Medicis: a ruling dynasty/Heather Lehr Wagner.

p. cm.—(Makers of the Middle Ages and Renaissance)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7910-8630-5 (hard cover)

1. Medici, House of—Juvenile literature. 2. Florence (Italy)—History—1421–1737—Juvenile literature. 3. Florence (Italy)—Kings and rulers—Biography—Juvenile literature. I. Title. II. Series.

DG737.42.W34 2005

945'.5'0099—dc22

2005007488

CONTENTS

1	Murder in the Cathedral	1
2	Bankers to the Republic	22
3	Lorenzo the Magnificent	46
4	A Medici Pope	69
5	Catherine de' Medici	87
6	A Dynasty's Decline	115
	CHRONOLOGY & TIMELINE	138
	NOTES	143
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	144
	FURTHER READING	145
	INDEX	146



Murder in the Cathedral



A large crowd had gathered for the celebration of Easter Mass on Sunday, April 26, 1478, at Florence's magnificent cathedral, the Duomo. Many distinguished and important men were inside. The nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, Cardinal Rafaello Riario, was there, as well as Francesco de' Pazzi, son of the wealthy Pazzi family.

Perhaps the most distinguished attendee, however, was young Lorenzo de' Medici, "Lorenzo the Magnificent," as he was known.

Lorenzo de' Medici was the head of the city-state of Florence, having inherited the role at the age of 21, upon the death of his father. For nine years, he had provided Florence with glory and prosperity. An astute politician and statesman, and an extraordinarily generous patron of the arts, Lorenzo de' Medici had overseen a period in which Florence became the intellectual and artistic capital of Europe, while ensuring itself a place of prominence among the most powerful city-states in Italy. By spending his own wealth for the public benefit, Lorenzo de' Medici's dominance of Florentine politics had provided its citizens with a time of great prosperity.

In addition to being a generous and wise statesman, Lorenzo de' Medici also knew how to have fun. He organized splendid tournaments and festivals, breathtaking fireworks displays, and grand pageants. The people of Florence loved him. As he stood in the cathedral, however, Lorenzo de' Medici did not realize that among the



Lorenzo de' Medici became head of the city-state of Florence at age 21, upon the death of his father. Lorenzo de' Medici was an astute politician and an extraordinary patron of the arts.

crowd were four men who were preparing to kill him before Mass ended.

THE PAZZI CONSPIRACY

The plot to assassinate Lorenzo de' Medici was organized by Pope Sixtus IV and his nephews in Rome. Joining them in the plot were members of Florence's noble Pazzi family, whose name would be used to describe what became known as the Pazzi Conspiracy. Pope Sixtus IV was, by all accounts, a cruel and ruthless representative of the Catholic Church, intent on using his office to obtain land and power for his family—principally his nephews. He was determined to add Florence to his conquests, and he decided that this goal would best be accomplished by eliminating Lorenzo de' Medici and his younger brother, Giuliano. Once both of the Medici brothers were out of the way, Pope Sixtus IV planned to make his nephew, Girolamo Riario, the new head of state of Florence. Riario could be counted on to be completely loyal to the pope.

Pope Sixtus IV was assisted in his plan by the Pazzi family, wealthy and proud Florentines who held an intense grudge against all members of

the Medici family—their rivals for power and influence in Florence—and Lorenzo de' Medici in particular. The Pazzi family supported the idea of assassinating the two Medici brothers, but intended to seize power for themselves once the Medicis had been eliminated.

Banks in Rome operated at the invitation of the pope. First the pope cancelled the Medici bank concession in Rome and transferred that right to the Pazzi family's bank. Next he appointed as archbishop of Pisa a member of the Salviati family, another family unfriendly to the Medicis. Lorenzo de' Medici was unhappy with the appointment, but he still seemed unaware of the diabolical plot that was unfolding against him.

By early 1478, the plans for Lorenzo de' Medici's assassination were in place. Among the conspirators were Girolamo Riario (who, in the pope's plan, would become Florence's head of state), the young cardinal Rafaello Riario (another of the pope's nephews who would travel to Florence to oversee the plan while Girolamo remained in Rome), Francesco Salviati (the archbishop-designate of Pisa, who had been promised by the pope that he

would become archbishop of Florence if the plan was a success), several members of the Pazzi family, and a mercenary soldier named Montesecco, who had been hired by the pope as the chief assassin.

In the first phase of the plot, troops led by men loyal to Pope Sixtus IV were sent to occupy various points along Florence's border. It was thought that once Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother had been assassinated, chaos would break out in Florence, allowing the troops to march in and seize control.

The other conspirators arrived in and around Florence, with many of them staying just outside the city at the home of Jacopo de' Pazzi, the head of the Pazzi family, whose villa bordered that of the Medicis. The Medicis, learning of the presence of the distinguished guest Rafaello Riario at the Pazzi villa, cordially invited the cardinal and his friends to a banquet at their home on Saturday, April 25. The conspirators were thrilled with the invitation, and quickly decided to poison Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Giuliano during the party. Unfortunately for the plotters, Giuliano was not well and did not attend the banquet, so the plan had to be reworked.

Hoping to create a new opportunity, the Pazzi family informed Lorenzo de' Medici that Cardinal Riario had heard much about the famous art treasures of the Medicis, and the gracious host quickly invited the cardinal and his friends to be his guests at the palace.

They all traveled to the palace in Florence, where the conspirators had determined that, after Mass, they would murder the two Medici brothers at their dinner table. To the plotters' dismay, it quickly became clear, however, that Giuliano de' Medici was still too ill to attend the celebratory dinner. He would attend the Easter Mass, but would then return to his room to rest and recover.

A new plot had to be formed, and quickly. By nightfall, the troops would be outside the gates of Florence and the element of surprise would be lost if their presence was discovered. The only solution was to seize the one moment when the two brothers would be in the same place at the same time—the Easter service at the Duomo. The cathedral would be crowded, allowing the murderers to act quickly and then disappear in the confusion. They would strike during the sacred

ceremony, when the host was raised and all heads were bowed.

The plot proved to be too much for Montesecco, the hired assassin, who had traveled to Florence with Archbishop Salviati. Montesecco vowed that he would commit murder but not sacrilege, and backed out of the plan. Two priests were willing to step in for Montesecco, and the details of the plot were finalized, at last. The two Medici brothers would be separated in the cathedral. The two priests would place themselves near Lorenzo de' Medici while Francesco de' Pazzi and his accomplice, Bernardo Bandini, would occupy Giuliano de' Medici.

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Near midday on Easter Sunday, Lorenzo de' Medici left his palace, accompanied by his guest Rafaello Riario, and began the walk toward the cathedral. Giuliano de' Medici was still not feeling well, but an anxious Francesco de' Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini persuaded him to join them for the Easter Mass, urging him out of bed. Francesco, pretending to help Giuliano as he limped along, put an arm around

him, secretly feeling around his waist to determine whether or not he was armed or wearing a mail shirt, a type of protective armor, under his clothes. He had neither a weapon nor protective clothing.

As planned, the two brothers were led to separate sections of the cathedral. Giuliano was taken to the northern side of the choir, near a door, while Lorenzo was placed at the south side of the choir. The host was raised and thousands of worshippers bowed their heads.

As Giuliano de' Medici bowed, Francesco de' Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini began stabbing him. Francesco de' Pazzi stabbed Giuliano a total of 18 times, with such fury that in the confusion he accidentally stabbed himself in the leg. Giuliano de' Medici immediately fell dead.

Had the expert soldier Montesecco remained with the plot, Lorenzo de' Medici might have met the same fate, but the priests who were the last-minute substitute assassins lacked Montesecco's expertise in handling weapons. Less quick to act than Bandini and de' Pazzi, they succeeded only in slashing Lorenzo de' Medici in the neck before he quickly pulled off his cloak and wrapped it around



Lorenzo's brother, Giuliano de' Medici (above), was stabbed multiple times and killed as a result of the Pazzi Conspiracy.

himself as a kind of makeshift shield. They had also failed to check Lorenzo for weapons. He was carrying a sword, which he quickly drew and used to fight off his attackers.

Lorenzo de' Medici jumped over the low rail surrounding the choir, ran across the front of the high altar, and quickly barricaded himself in the sacristy, the room in the church where the clergy dressed and sacred vessels were kept. He was joined by a few friends who bolted the heavy bronze doors and stood at guard. With the cathedral in chaos, worshippers screamed and attempted to determine who was responsible for striking at the Medicis. In the confusion, the assassins were able to escape and Cardinal Riario hid in the high altar.

As the cathedral emptied, one of Lorenzo de' Medici's aides climbed to the top of the organ gallery, over the sacristy door. From there, he could see the whole empty cathedral, and it was then that he spotted the dead body of Giuliano de' Medici, lying in a puddle of blood. Soon a knock was heard at the sacristy door. A group of Lorenzo's friends had arrived to carry him home to safety.

THE ATTACK ON THE SIGNORIA

In addition to the assassination attempt on the Medicis, another key element of the plot had revolved around seizing control of Florence in the chaos. Archbishop Salviati, the would-be archbishop of Florence, had been given the job of seizing control of the government, helping to paralyze Florence just before the troops marched into the city. As the attackers were striking the Medicis in the cathedral, Archbishop Salviati arrived at the Palazzo della Signoria, the palace where Florence's chief legislators were meeting. Salviati and his followers planned to make a ceremonial entrance into the council chamber and then, using the element of surprise, seize the government and kill all members of the legislature—known as the *Signoria*—who resisted.

Something about the arrival of Salviati and his entourage aroused the suspicion of the *gonfaloniere*, one of the chief officials of the Signoria, who cordially invited the archbishop and his entourage into his own private rooms and then sent out a messenger to determine whether anything unusual was going on in the city. The messenger quickly



In addition to plotting the murders of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici, another key element of the Pazzi Conspiracy revolved around seizing control of Florence in the chaos following the assassinations. A view of the city is shown here.

returned to relate the reports of chaos in the cathedral. Accompanying him was the noise of an angry mob forming in the streets.

In the midst of the crowd, elderly Jacopo de' Pazzi and other members of his family, accompanied by 100 armed men, rode on horseback, urging the crowds with cries of "Liberty!" and "Down with the

Palle!” *Palle*, or balls, were the symbol on the crest of the Medici family. Instead, the crowd responded with angry cries of “Long Live the Palle!”¹

Quickly determining what had happened—and what was about to happen—the gonfaloniere seized Archbishop Salviati and hanged him, leaving his body dangling from the corner window of the council hall. Five of his conspirators were also hanged from other windows. The remaining 26 members of Salviati’s group were struck down in the stairway as they attempted to flee.

These actions were not sufficient for the angry mob, however, which quickly hunted down the other conspirators. Francesco de’ Pazzi, weak from his own wounds, had escaped to his home. He was dragged from his bed and hanged next to the body of the archbishop. Few stopped to ask questions or determine guilt or innocence. Anyone suspected of being part of the plot was seized and killed. Seventy people were killed in the first four days. Some 200 more people would be killed before the chaos had ended. Old Jacopo de’ Pazzi, who had attempted to inspire the crowds with his shouts of “Liberty!,” was also killed. After his burial, his body was pulled out

of its grave and dragged through the streets, before his naked remains were finally dumped into the Arno River.

Bernardo Bandini, one of Giuliano de' Medici's assassins, escaped to Constantinople, but the sultan of the Ottoman Empire ordered that he be returned to Florence in chains, where he was immediately executed. The Pazzi family name, by public decree, was forever erased. Any places in Florence that bore the Pazzi name, including their own palaces, were renamed. Anyone married to a Pazzi was barred from public office. Lorenzo de' Medici showed mercy to a few members of the plot, however. Having escaped the cathedral, upon reaching his own home, he ordered a guard to protect Cardinal Riario, one of the chief conspirators who had been hiding in the high altar. The cardinal was taken to the Medici Palace, where he was kept hidden for several days before being secretly conveyed back to Rome.

A PAPAL WAR

The pope was furious at the plot's failure, and angry that his part in the conspiracy had been uncovered. He immediately denounced the Florentine

government for what he called the criminal and sacrilegious hanging of his representative, the archbishop, and demanded that Lorenzo de' Medici surrender himself to religious authorities. Medici refused, protesting that his only crime had been not allowing himself to be murdered.² The Florentine legislature joined Lorenzo de' Medici in his protest, offering as proof the signed confession of one of the conspirators who linked the pope to the plot, and calling upon other European rulers for support.

Events quickly spiraled out of control. The pope announced that the entire state of Florence was excommunicated, expelled from the Catholic Church. Clergy in Florence responded by outlawing the pope. Pope Sixtus IV then declared war on Florence. He announced that all Catholics were forbidden from trading with Florence, and enforced treaties he had formed with Siena and the king of Naples, whose troops invaded Tuscany.

The war and the barriers to trade placed a heavy burden on the Florentine people, and Lorenzo de' Medici soon determined that he must surrender, if only to protect his people. The legislature refused to allow him to do so, however, and Lorenzo was



Pope Sixtus IV (seated at right) was furious at the Pazzi plot's failure, and angry that his part in the conspiracy had been uncovered. He immediately denounced the Florentine government for what he called the criminal and sacrilegious hanging of his representative, the archbishop. He also demanded that Lorenzo de' Medici surrender himself to religious authorities.

forced to slip away secretly. He traveled first to Pisa and then to Naples to meet with King Ferrante, an ally of the pope's.

King Ferrante was impressed, both by Lorenzo de' Medici's courage in slipping through the war zone to travel to Naples, and with his argument that, should the pope become too powerful, a weakened Florence under the pope's domination would not prove to be in Naples's best interest. For three months, Lorenzo de' Medici stayed in Naples, where he was treated as an honored guest, rather than a political prisoner. In the end, Lorenzo de' Medici had achieved a treaty with Naples that promised some land and financial support for Naples in exchange for an end to the fighting. The pope was furious at this turn of events, but an attack on Italian soil by Turkish troops forced him to agree to peace with Florence so that a unified Italy might fight off the Turkish invasion.

Lorenzo de' Medici returned to Florence having achieved an honorable peace. His people cheered him as their hero. Throughout Italy, he was hailed as a brilliant diplomat, a skillful financier, and the man who brought greatness back to Florence.

The Pazzi Conspiracy ultimately ended in failure. Its consequences, however—the death of Lorenzo de' Medici's beloved younger brother, the war that followed, and the threats to Lorenzo and his family—would forever mark the reign of Lorenzo de' Medici. The carefree young man who loved poetry and pageants was gone. In his place was a more serious ruler, determined to consolidate all power under his control and eliminate any potential rivals.

The story of the Medici Dynasty might have ended in the Duomo on that Easter Sunday. Instead it marked another interesting event in the saga of a single family that dominated the politics of Florence for three centuries—a family whose rise to power would signal the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy.

Test Your Knowledge

- 1 What is the name of Florence's cathedral?
 - a. The Vatican
 - b. The Duomo
 - c. The Medici Palace
 - d. The Pazzi

- 2 What was the name of the plot to kill to Medici brothers?
 - a. The Florence Conspiracy
 - b. The Pope Sixtus Conspiracy
 - c. The Pazzi Conspiracy
 - d. The Medici Conspiracy

- 3 How many times was Giuliano de' Medici stabbed?
 - a. 50
 - b. 18
 - c. 10
 - d. 32

- 4 In addition to the assassination attempt on the Medicis, another key element of the plot involved what?
 - a. Seizing control of Florence in the chaos
 - b. Taking control of the Vatican
 - c. Installing the pope in power
 - d. Seizing control of the legislature

- 5 For how long did the Medici family dominate Florentine politics?
- a. 50 years
 - b. 10 centuries
 - c. 200 years
 - d. 3 centuries

ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. c; 3. b; 4. a; 5. d



Bankers to the Republic



By the late fourteenth century, Florence had witnessed triumph and tragedy. Rival groups had battled for control over the city whose territory and power were much greater than the Florence we know today. Florence had conquered Pisa, Prato, Volterra, and Pistoia—among other Italian cities—and

comprised a region with autonomy and independence more similar to a state than a city. The following four city-states controlled most of the power in Italy: Venice, Naples, Milan, and Florence. Their rulers were constantly challenging each other for prestige, territory, and alliances with foreign powers.

Authority within Florence rested, in large part, within a system of guilds—groups of merchants or craftsmen—which had been organized in the city. There were 21 guilds in total, among them wool merchants, silk merchants, judges, lawyers, doctors, and bankers. Young Giovanni de' Medici belonged to the guild of bankers.

Giovanni de' Medici was born into a middle-class Florentine family in 1360. Florence was, at the time of his birth and during his early years, quite powerful. Small wars with neighboring states had added to its territory and power. The region then known as Florence would today more accurately be identified as Tuscany. Florence was a European leader in trade and commerce, and through its banking industry, Florentines were beginning to make their influence felt around the world.

Members of the Medici family were well known as bankers, and for their political activism in Florence. Giovanni de' Medici's father, Averardo, was a banker, and his great-grandfather, also named Averardo, had operated a successful trading business. His grandfather Salvestro had been sent, in 1336, as a diplomat to finalize the treaty between Florence and Venice, while a distant cousin, also named Salvestro, had contributed to the riot of the *ciompi*, the cloth guild workers, which helped to bring about the fall of the noble class in Florence.

The Medici family tradition included examples of hard work, and of success both in finance and politics. This was Giovanni's heritage, but it was his life and accomplishments that would mark the rise of the Medici ruling dynasty.

WEALTH AND POWER

By the time Giovanni de' Medici had reached middle age, he was a millionaire. Of the 80 banking families in Florence, the Medicis had risen to the top, with branches of their bank in 16 European capitals. The most important men in the Florentine guilds were expected to become involved in politics,

and Giovanni de' Medici could have become a very influential political figure. Instead he chose to spend his money and energy on public works. He contributed toward building churches and he donated to charity, funding the construction of the Foundling Hospital of Florence. He also employed as the hospital's architect Filippo Brunelleschi, who would go on to become one of Florence's leading architects of the time, overseeing the construction of the impressive grand dome over Florence's largest cathedral. Giovanni de' Medici supported young artists, commissioning a group of them to decorate his home with frescoes. He also incurred much criticism and gossip in the process, as that type of decoration—most often used in churches—was considered excessive for a private home.

Giovanni de' Medici had married Piccarda Bueri in 1386. Their oldest son, Cosimo, was born on September 27, 1389. Six years later, a second son, Lorenzo, would be born. The family lived a fairly simple life, not merely because Giovanni had gained a reputation for being a prudent man. Homes, even of the wealthiest Florentines, were not built or furnished for beauty or comfort. Floors

were bare stone; the walls were whitewashed and seldom covered with any hangings or tapestries; chairs were made of wood, straight-backed, covered only with leather; beds were wide and hard. Even

The Duomo



The Duomo (Italian for “cathedral”) of Florence was finally completed in 1436, while Cosimo de’ Medici was in power. Its soaring dome has become a symbolic part of the Florence skyline. The cathedral itself was built over the course of six centuries, its construction ebbing and flowing in reflection of the turmoil in Florence at the time. It was built on the site of an earlier cathedral, Santa Reparata, which had been a place of worship for Florentines for nine centuries. In 1293, the Florentine Republic decided to finance a larger and grander cathedral, and the people of Florence were expected to contribute to this project. In fact, a law was passed stating that the wills of all Florentine citizens must include a tax to help finance the cathedral’s construction.

The first architect, Arnolfo di Cambio, designed a soaring place of worship and oversaw the beginning of its construction, in 1296. Work continued until

the wealthiest of homes contained only these pieces, plus, perhaps, a large credenza holding the family's best vases, glass, and silver for formal dinners, and a chest for linen and clothes.³

his death in 1302. A succession of architects contributed to other parts of the design, including the bell tower, the center nave, and the south doors, as well as the plan for external marble and the decorative side entrances. One problem remained: how to construct and support a cupola large enough to soar over the massive cathedral. The architect Brunelleschi was eventually chosen to manage this most challenging part of the cathedral's plan, and the brilliant system of supports he designed made the Duomo a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture.

Pope Eugene IV dedicated the Duomo on March 25, 1436, some 140 years after construction began. Forty-two years later, Lorenzo de' Medici would narrowly escape assassination while celebrating Easter Mass at the cathedral. Final design elements, including the addition of white, green, and red marble to the exterior, were made to the facade in 1886.



The same simple, plain style was used for clothing, as well. There were actually laws in Florence to govern what was and was not considered appropriate dress for the people. Women were strictly instructed on what material dresses might be made of, and they took care to avoid any of a long list of forbidden decorations. These same rules specified acceptable length—and width—for women's dresses.

Men also were restricted in what they could wear. For most men, the required clothing was a simple, plain, long garment, with buttons down the front, resembling the long black cloak or cassock a priest might wear. This plainness and simple style would gradually slip away, however, as the artists that Giovanni de' Medici was employing, and other artists that future generations of Medicis would support, began to carve out a new style that would become known as Renaissance style.

A JUST TAX

In the early 1400s, as a sign of his prominence within the banking guild, Giovanni de' Medici was chosen to serve as one of the seven priors, or representatives, comprising the legislature of Florence,

known as the Signoria. In 1421, he was elected gonfaloniere of Florence, literally meaning “standard bearer,” but actually an important ceremonial office.

Giovanni de’ Medici’s most significant political action came in 1426, when he fought fierce opposition from the noble class to oversee the passage of a new and fairer tax, known as the *catasto*. Up until that time, taxes had been enacted arbitrarily, when a war or government shortfall meant that Florence needed additional cash. For years, the wealthy families of Florence had benefited from a system of indirect taxes, which imposed heavy, random taxes—sometimes several in a single year—and an additional random poll tax on all Florentines. Giovanni de’ Medici’s proposal was a new, 1.5 percent tax on all capital, with the wealthier citizens paying more than the poorest. All citizens were required to declare their possessions—gold and silver, jewels, property, income, and investments. In the event of an emergency, such as a war, however, the tax would be collected with the heaviest burden falling on the wealthiest families. The tax was regarded as a significant step toward social progress, and it made Giovanni de’ Medici a hero to the poorest citizens of Florence.

When Giovanni de' Medici was killed on February 28, 1429, his family was one of the wealthiest in all of Florence. His vast fortune was passed on to his two sons, Cosimo and Lorenzo.

IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

As the oldest son, it was Cosimo de' Medici's responsibility to run the family business. At the time of his father's death, Cosimo de' Medici was 40 years old, and had already formed an important alliance with the current pope, John XXIII. Having helped to save the pope's life, Cosimo de' Medici had earned for the Medici family the pope's loyalty, plus—perhaps more important—the lucrative and prestigious responsibility of serving as official banker for the vast wealth of the Catholic Church.

As Cosimo de' Medici assumed control of the family's business, he seemed likely to follow closely in his father's footsteps. He was similar to his father in personality, modest and tactful in his business dealings, and generous with artists and others in need.

Two years after his father's death, Cosimo de' Medici decided to build a new home—a palace—for his family, near the Church of San Lorenzo. He



When Giovanni de' Medici was killed on February 28, 1429, his family was one of the wealthiest in all of Florence. His vast fortune was passed on to his two sons, Cosimo and Lorenzo. Cosimo, shown here, was the oldest son. As such, he assumed responsibility for the family business.

determined that his palace would be something extraordinary, something that would reflect the new styles in architecture and design that were beginning to flourish in Florence. He hired talented artists and sculptors to create masterpieces to adorn his new home. The result was the Medici Palace, a building that still stands as a landmark of architectural achievement from the early years of the Renaissance.

Cosimo de' Medici was passionately interested in art, and he became a great patron of Florentine artists. He would eventually build three villas for his family and a convent for the Dominicans at San Marco. He supported the sculptor Donatello, as well as painters Fra Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico, and Benozzo Gozzoli. He also supported learning and philosophy, paying for the construction of several libraries and schools.

Unfortunately, Cosimo de' Medici's wealth, success, and popularity, and the grand family palace he was constructing sparked jealousy among the other wealthy families in Florence. In 1433, one of the Medici family's rivals, the Albizzi family, accused Cosimo and his family of posing a danger to the state because of their wealth and ambition.⁴



Two years after his father's death, Cosimo de' Medici decided to build a new home—a palace—for his family. Medici Palace, shown here, still stands today.

The proof, the Albizzis claimed, could be found in Cosimo de' Medici's elaborate new palace, far more luxurious and extravagant than that of an ordinary Florentine citizen.

The charges were successful. On September 7, 1433, Cosimo de' Medici was arrested, charged with treason, and imprisoned in a cell in the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria. The Albizzis, and others intent on eliminating the Medicis, sought the death penalty for Cosimo de' Medici's crimes. Cosimo de' Medici, meanwhile, possibly fearing that his enemies might attempt to poison him while in prison, refused to eat anything for four days, until one of his jailers shared his own food, eating at the same time, so that Cosimo de' Medici might be assured that the food was safe.

With the help of his jailer, Cosimo de' Medici was able to smuggle a bribe to members of the Signoria who were deciding his fate, and instead of execution, he, his brother, and other members of the Medici family were banished from Florence. A few days after the sentence was passed down, Cosimo de' Medici was taken by an armed guard to the frontier of Florence and was ordered never to return.

LIFE IN EXILE

With Cosimo, Lorenzo, and other members of the Medici family scattered throughout Italy, the Albizzis and others, no doubt, felt confident that

they had successfully eliminated the Medici family's power and influence from Florence. The nobles quickly set out to undo many of the laws that the Medicis had supported, attempting to once more assure the dominance of the noble class in Florence.

All friends of the Medicis were punished for their association with the family, either by being similarly forced into exile or imprisoned. Many of the artists the Medicis had supported quickly left Florence. The architect Brunelleschi was imprisoned; his work on the construction of the cathedral's soaring dome abruptly halted.

The Albizzis soon launched Florence into a war against the small city-state of Lucca. The war proved expensive, massively unpopular, and ultimately unsuccessful. Lucca had an alliance with Milan, however, so the war against Lucca also led Florence into war with Milan. This conflict would drag on for several years.

Within one year, however, a new Signoria had been chosen, and many of the members were hostile to the Albizzis. They quickly passed a law canceling the banishment of the Medicis and on October 5, Cosimo de' Medici returned to Florence, welcomed



Cosimo de' Medici (on horseback at right) returns to Florence from exile. The people welcome him with great joy.

with great joy by the people. Machiavelli, the famous political tactician and author who spent many years studying and attempting to win the favor of the Medicis, noted, “Seldom has a citizen returning from a great victory been greeted by such a concourse of people and with such demonstrations of affection as Cosimo on his return from exile.”⁵

Shortly after his return, as proof of his popularity, Cosimo de' Medici was elected gonfaloniere. His term in that office would last only three months. He

had in mind a different, more powerful role to help avoid another exile from Florence. His enemies, upon his return, were forced out of office; many of them fled Florence. Those in the Signoria, acknowledging Cosimo's status, were now quick to show their support for the Medici. Cosimo de' Medici took advantage of their support to have himself appointed as banker to the republic and advisor to the government.

BANKER TO THE REPUBLIC

Cosimo de' Medici placed much of his own money at the disposal of the republic. He was generous with loans, and generous with expenses he personally undertook on behalf of all of Florence. He entertained important dignitaries and foreign leaders at his own expense, housing them in his palace. Emperors, princes, diplomats, and the pope were all his guests at one time or another. Through his hosting and entertaining, Florence gradually became a center for political and religious deliberations, glittering cultural events, and thriving commerce.

Through these activities, Cosimo de' Medici also became recognized as Florence's head of state, even

when he held no official title and was not considered a part of the government. Florentines and foreigners knew that Cosimo de' Medici had the diplomatic connections, financial resources, and status to get things done.

His investments and loans in foreign countries made it possible for Cosimo de' Medici to influence foreign relations. When the leaders of Venice and Naples threatened Florence, Cosimo de' Medici was able to use his bank's investments and loans in those two city-states to stabilize the conflict. Rather than having the Medici banks call in their loans, which would have brought the economies of those two regions to collapse, their leaders reluctantly negotiated peaceful settlements.

Cosimo de' Medici also continued to invest generously in the arts. Some of the greatest artists of the day worked on his commissions at the Church of San Lorenzo, the Medici Palace, and the monastery of San Marco. He collected many different kinds of art, and opened his collections to all artists. In 1436, Brunelleschi completed his work on the grand dome soaring above Florence's cathedral and as Brunelleschi's patron—and a generous donor to the



In 1436, Filippo Brunelleschi completed his work on the grand dome soaring above Florence's cathedral. As Brunelleschi's patron—and a generous donor to the dome's construction—Cosimo de' Medici took credit for the completion of the cathedral.

dome's construction—Cosimo de' Medici took credit for the completion of the cathedral, after 138 years of construction.

PATER PATRIAE

Cosimo de' Medici's control of Florence marked a period of prosperity and artistic achievement. In 1440, his grand palace on the Via Larga was finally ready, after some ten years of construction. Joining Cosimo de' Medici and his wife were their two sons, Piero and Giovanni, who were then 24 and 19 years old respectively. Only a few years after the move into the palace, both sons married. Still later, grandchildren (sons and daughters of Piero) would join the family.

Cosimo de' Medici appreciated having his family by his side, but his sons were not healthy, and in 1463, his younger son, Giovanni, died. His son's death was a great tragedy for Cosimo de' Medici, who was carried through the rooms of the palace muttering, "Too large a house for so small a family." ⁶

After some 30 years of dominance, Cosimo de' Medici died on August 1, 1464, at the age of 75. The people of Florence, who had retained their love and respect for him until the end, wanted to honor

him with a grand funeral, but the Medici family declined. Instead the Signoria issued a public decree, conferring on Cosimo de' Medici the title *Pater Patriae* ("Father of his Country"), noting that the title should be inscribed on his tomb. He was buried in the Church of San Lorenzo, a church for whose construction he had paid.

Machiavelli wrote of Cosimo de' Medici:

He was one of the most prudent of men; grave and courteous and of venerable appearance. His early years were full of trouble, exile, and personal danger, but by the unwearied generosity of his disposition he triumphed over all his enemies and made himself most popular with the people. Though so rich, yet in his mode of living he was always very simple and without ostentation. None of his time had such an intimate knowledge of government and of State affairs. Hence even in a city so given to change, he retained the Government for thirty years.⁷

The day after Cosimo de' Medici's death, his son Piero told his sons, Lorenzo and Giuliano, of their grandfather's legacy:



Piero de' Medici, Cosimo de' Medici's son, is shown here. It was not Piero de' Medici, but rather his sons, who would eventually rule Florence and continue the Medici legacy.

He counselled me that, as you had good abilities, I ought to bring you up well, and you would then relieve me of many cares. . . . He said that he did not wish any pomp or demonstration at his funeral. . . . He reminded me, as he had told me before, of where he wished to be buried in San Lorenzo, and said all in such an orderly manner, and with so much prudence and spirit, that it was wonderful. He added that his life had been long, therefore he was well content to leave it when God willed.⁸

Cosimo de' Medici's final words would prove prophetic. For it was not in Piero's hands, but in the hands of his sons, that the Medici family would again dominate Florence.

Test Your Knowledge

- 1 Authority within Florence rested principally in what?
 - a. A system of guilds
 - b. An organized legal system
 - c. The authority of the Catholic Church
 - d. Local governments
- 2 To what guild did Giovanni de' Medici belong?
 - a. The guild of silk merchants
 - b. The guild of doctors
 - c. The guild of bankers
 - d. The guild of lawyers
- 3 At the time of Giovanni de' Medici's birth, the region then known as Florence would today more accurately be identified as
 - a. Tuscany.
 - b. Rome.
 - c. Pisa.
 - d. Venice.
- 4 How long did Cosimo de' Medici rule Florence?
 - a. 100 years
 - b. 30 years
 - c. 35 years
 - d. 50 years

- 5 Where was Cosimo de' Medici buried?
- a. The Duomo
 - b. The Vatican
 - c. The Medici Palace
 - d. The Church of San Lorenzo

ANSWERS: 1. a; 2. c; 3. a; 4. b; 5. d



Lorenzo the Magnificent



Cosimo de' Medici knew his son Piero well enough to have feared the fate of the Medici dynasty when it lay in his son's hands. Forty-eight-year-old Piero suffered from gout, a disease whose symptoms include painful inflammation of the joints, and lacked the energy and focus of his father and grandfather.

In Cosimo de' Medici's final years, loans to Edward IV of England and Charles the Bold of Burgundy had placed the Medici bank's finances at risk. When Piero de' Medici assumed control of the family's banks, he was confused by what seemed to be the precarious state of the Medici financial holdings. One of his father's advisors was called in to assist, and he suggested that Piero stabilize things by demanding repayment of the Medici loans. Chaos quickly followed. Those businesses that were unable to promptly repay their loans failed and Florence itself was put at risk, as the state struggled to repay its debt. Critics labeled Piero de' Medici a miser who was willing to destroy Florence in order to protect his own fortune.

During one of Piero de' Medici's frequent illnesses, a plot was hatched by the Poggios, enemies of the Medicis and of Florence—including the Duke of Ferrara and leaders of rival Venice—first to destroy the Medici bank, and then to murder Piero and assume control of Florence. Piero de' Medici was warned of the plot by a letter from the ruler of Bologna, stating that troops belonging to the Duke of Ferrara were massing on the Florentine border.

Despite his illness, Piero de' Medici ordered his attendants to put him on a stretcher and carry him to the Signoria to warn of the impending attack.

On August 27, 1466, Piero de' Medici made his dramatic appearance, and the sudden revelation of the plot was enough to bring it to a halt. The Signoria quickly approached Ferrara and Venice with offers to negotiate, while ordering troops—and their allies, the Milanese army—to assume defensive positions on the border. When the plot ended, the Signoria passed death sentences against all conspirators, but Piero de' Medici refused to have the men executed. With his actions, he was able to avoid the division of Florence into pro- and anti-Medici factions, and the rebellion against him ended peacefully.

A GRAND WEDDING

Piero de' Medici had two sons, Lorenzo and Giuliano, and two daughters, Bianca and Nannina. Weddings in the Medici family were an opportunity to form strategic alliances. Bianca and Nannina de' Medici were both married at a young age to sons of distinguished Florentine families, and it was expected that

Lorenzo de' Medici, the oldest son, would also be married to a member of a wealthy family in Florence.

Piero de' Medici and his wife, Lucrezia, however, had greater ambitions for their oldest son. One of the most powerful families in Italy was the Orsinis of Rome. Members of the Orsini family had played a leading role in many of Italy's wars, and in much of its politics. They had close connections to the Catholic Church, and many members of the family were noblemen and women.

It was decided that Lorenzo de' Medici would marry Clarice Orsini, the beautiful, red-headed daughter of a baron, and the niece of a cardinal. A grand jousting tournament was held to celebrate the engagement, and all of Florence's most important citizens were invited to attend. Handsome young men, dressed as knights, were accompanied by heralds, trumpeters, and pages, all displaying their knight's colors. Crowds watched the tournament from balconies and roofs. First the knights paraded around the square, before changing into their armor for the combat.

Lorenzo de' Medici was perhaps the most dazzling of all, with a shield studded with diamonds, a cap dotted with rubies and more diamonds, and a

velvet coat fringed with gold. His helmet bore three blue feathers, and his horse was draped with red and white velvet, embroidered with pearls.⁹ Lorenzo de' Medici won first prize in the tournament, earning a silver helmet with a statue of Mars, the Roman god of war, on top.

One year later, on June 4, 1469, in another grand celebration, Lorenzo de' Medici and Clarice Orsini were married. A gala party given by the groom's parents followed, to which all of Florence was invited. The party, which lasted three days, was marked by feasting, dancing, and music. Simultaneously, the wealthier members of Florentine society were entertained at five separate banquets held at the Medici family palace.

Six months after Lorenzo de' Medici's wedding, the young man became head of the Medici family when his father, Piero, died on December 2, 1469, and was buried next to the tomb of his brother Giovanni. When he was older, Lorenzo wrote:

Two days after the death of my father, although I, Lorenzo, was very young, being only in my twenty-first year, the principal men of the city

and the state came to our house to condole on our loss and encourage me to take on myself the care of the city and the state, as my father and grandfather had done. This proposal being contrary to the instincts of my youthful age and considering that the burden and danger were great, I consented unwillingly, but I did so to protect our friends and our property, for it fares ill in Florence with anyone who possesses great wealth without any control in the government.¹⁰

YOUNG AND CAPABLE RULER

Lorenzo de' Medici's early years as head of the family and ruler of Florence were a time of great prosperity for all. He was a poet, a patron of the arts, and a young man who loved beauty. He invited the great thinkers and artists of the day to his home, hosting parties where the men who were shaping the Renaissance in Florence came together to inspire and be inspired.

During the first nine years of his reign, Lorenzo de' Medici and his younger brother, Giuliano, organized tremendous costumed themed spectacles, parades, and midnight tournaments with fireworks.



Lorenzo de' Medici was a brilliant statesman, considered by many to be the greatest of all the Medicis. The people of Florence paid homage to him.

The artist Botticelli was inspired by these events to create some of his most famous masterpieces, including *Birth of Venus*, *Mars and Venus*, and *Return of Spring*. During these years of splendor and spectacle, Lorenzo de' Medici provided lavish entertainment for himself and his people, noting in one of the many poems he wrote as a young man:

*How passing fair is youth,
Forever fleeting away;
Who happy would be, let him be;
Of tomorrow who can say?*¹¹

Lorenzo de Medici's words proved prophetic, for his happy, carefree years as unofficial ruler of Florence did not last long. As early as 1474, he came into conflict with the new pope, Sixtus IV, arguing over land. Florence had on its southern, eastern, and northern borders, states under the control of the pope, and these so-called papal states came into question when Pope Sixtus IV decided to seize the small city of Imola for his nephew.

Imola had been loosely under Florentine control, and with its loss, Lorenzo de' Medici was determined to take a more forceful position against

any other papal conquests, to ensure that towns near Imola did not slip away. Lorenzo de' Medici formed an alliance with Venice and Milan, aiming to "safeguard the peninsula's [Italy's] peace."¹² In reality, the alliance only angered the pope and prompted him to form his own alliance with the king of Naples. The pope's anger against Lorenzo de' Medici grew, and as we learned earlier, led to an assassination attempt against Lorenzo, the murder of his brother, an attempted revolt in Florence, and a war.

THE MAGNIFICENT

When Lorenzo de' Medici returned to Florence, having successfully negotiated peace with Naples, he was greeted as a hero, and labeled "Lorenzo the Magnificent." Lacking an official title, he was, nonetheless, determined to ensure Florence's safety, consolidate his power in Italy, and protect himself from future threats. The Florentine people were willing to support him in whatever way he deemed necessary.

Lorenzo de' Medici chose not to seize an official title. He chose not to have himself named a prince

or crowned king of Florence. Instead he chose to ensure his power by establishing a kind of dominance over all aspects of Florentine life—its politics, its diplomacy, and the establishment of schools, libraries, and churches—while still maintaining the appearance of a democracy in the continuation of the elected legislature, the Signoria. In reality, however, it was with Lorenzo de' Medici that foreign rulers and dignitaries met, and it was also to Lorenzo de' Medici that people went with their requests for a public building, a favor, or an appointment to an important position.

Lorenzo de' Medici was able to retain his power in part because, like his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, he was extraordinarily generous. He donated his own money to build libraries and churches. He supported artists and then opened his extensive collections to the public.

He was also a brilliant statesman, considered by many to be the greatest of all the Medicis. He understood that the true threat to the Italian city-states came not from within but from outside. It was not the small wars for territory between individual Italian city-states that were to be feared, but the

threat of invasion from foreign powers, like France and Spain.

Lorenzo de' Medici also proved to be a great judge of art. Many young artists came to the Medici gardens to learn, copying the styles of great artists of the past. Lorenzo de' Medici enjoyed walking among the young art students, spotting talent. One young man who particularly impressed him was invited to live in the palace, joining the family for meals as he pursued his art. This young man, unofficially “adopted” by Lorenzo de' Medici, was the great artist Michelangelo. Lorenzo de' Medici also sponsored Leonardo da Vinci, another young artist who would become closely identified with the Renaissance.

LORENZO DE' MEDICI'S CHILDREN

Lorenzo de' Medici had four daughters and three sons. Lorenzo married two of his daughters to relatives of those who had participated in the Pazzi Conspiracy, to help heal any ongoing wounds in Florence. He followed the example of his own parents by selecting a member of the Orsini family of Rome, Alfonsina Orsini, to be his son Piero's wife.

Michelangelo

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born on March 6, 1475, in Caprese, Italy. His mother died when he was only six, and at a young age he was sent away to school, where he learned Latin and studied art. His father was horrified at Michelangelo's decision to become an apprentice to a painter at the age of 13, wanting his son to become a businessman instead. Michelangelo studied painting and sculpture in the Medici gardens, where he came to the attention of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and soon was living in the Medici Palace. While there, he spent time with the two Medicis who would become Popes Leo X and Clement VII.

During the regime of Girolamo Savonarola, Michelangelo went to Rome, to study its classical statues and ruins. Michelangelo produced his famous sculpture *Pietà* during this time, finishing it before he was 25.

He returned to Florence in 1501, sculpting the giant marble statue *David* to symbolize his desire that Florentines mimic the biblical leader in courage and a sense of duty. Seven years later, Pope Julius II called him back to Rome, to paint 12 figures of apostles on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the





Vatican. Michelangelo had thought of himself as a sculptor, but by the time the project was completed (in 1512), he had painted more than 400 figures in a masterpiece of artwork containing numerous scenes from the Bible. Michelangelo was also commissioned to create a fitting tomb for Pope Julius II in St. Peter's, and the Medici tombs for Lorenzo de' Medici (the Duke of Urbino) and Giuliano de' Medici (the Duke of Nemours).

Michelangelo left Florence forever in 1534, disgusted by the brutality of Alessandro de' Medici. He returned to Rome, where Pope Clement VII commissioned him to paint a fresco of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel. It would become the largest fresco created during the Renaissance, and a target of criticism for its depiction of nudity. Completed in 1541, the fresco was later "edited" by an artist who added drapes to cover the nude figures.

In 1546, Michelangelo was made chief architect of St. Peter's Basilica. He considered it a sacred duty, and would accept no payment for his labors. Michelangelo died on February 18, 1564. He is remembered today as one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance.



As a patron of the arts, Lorenzo de' Medici sponsored artists Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Michelangelo's *Man's Face* is shown here.

Lorenzo de' Medici was also anxious to mend ties with the Catholic Church. Through lobbying, Medici's second son, Giovanni, was admitted into a training program for high office in the Catholic Church when he was only seven years old. King Louis XI of France, a friend of Lorenzo's, appointed

Giovanni archbishop of Aix-en-Provence when he was only 12 years old. With the death of Pope Sixtus IV, Lorenzo's former enemy, the election of a new pope, Innocent VIII, made Lorenzo de' Medici's efforts complete. In 1492, 17-year-old Giovanni de' Medici was named a cardinal.

As Giovanni de' Medici left for Rome to take his position as the youngest cardinal, Lorenzo de' Medici wrote his son a letter. He urged his son to lead a simple, virtuous life, by avoiding temptation and keeping his temper. Lorenzo de' Medici told his son to first use his ears rather than his tongue, to rise early, eat simple food, and get plenty of exercise. Finally he urged his son to be a good priest, to place the honor and advantage of the church first, but to note that he would have many opportunities to serve his city and his house, for the alliance of the church was essential to Florence, and Giovanni was to be the link between them.¹³

By 1489, facing the decline of his health, Lorenzo de' Medici focused more of his energy on his children. The late 1400s, though marked by great achievements in the arts, was not a time of greatness in medicine, and Lorenzo feared for the future. His

oldest son, Piero, he described as headstrong (*pazzo*); Giovanni was discreet (*savio*); the youngest, Giuliano, was virtuous (*buono*).¹⁴

Lorenzo de' Medici knew how difficult it was to hold a state together. He also knew that the Medici fortunes were not endless. He worried that his son Piero might not be strong enough. He worried, too, about the annoying problem of Father Girolamo Savonarola, a new, outspoken priest in Florence.

PREACHING DOOM

The focus of Father Savonarola's preaching was that the lavish excesses of the Medicis were leading Florence into destruction. Father Savonarola loudly criticized Lorenzo de' Medici's lifestyle, urging the people of Florence to turn away from sin, and to choose a more sober, religious life before God punished them.

The fundamentalist preaching drew many to Father Savonarola's side, and Lorenzo de' Medici, who understood the threat, attempted, unsuccessfully, to appease Father Savonarola. Soon Father Savonarola was loudly denouncing the Medicis from his pulpit at the Duomo, warning of a terrible



Father Girolamo Savonarola, shown here, was an outspoken priest in Florence. He openly criticized Lorenzo de' Medici's lifestyle, urging the people of Florence to turn away from sin and choose a more sober, religious life before God punished them.

fate that was coming, and divine punishment for the Medicis and their supporters.

“Tell Lorenzo to do penance for his sins,” Father Savonarola warned, “for God will punish him and his.”¹⁵ Father Savonarola predicted that, within a year, Lorenzo de’ Medici would die, and his prediction proved correct. On his deathbed, Lorenzo de’ Medici sent for Father Savonarola to hear his confession. The priest appeared, but before he agreed to hear Lorenzo de’ Medici’s confession and offer repentance, he demanded three things. First he asked that Lorenzo de’ Medici admit his faith in God’s mercy. Medici quickly agreed. Second, Father Savonarola demanded that Lorenzo de’ Medici agree to repay any public funds he had used for his own expenses. Again Medici agreed. Finally Father Savonarola demanded that Lorenzo de’ Medici restore full liberty to Florence, removing it from Medici control. To this demand, the proud Medici was not willing to concede, and he turned his face to the wall. He died only a short while later, on April 8, 1492, bringing the rule of Lorenzo the Magnificent to an end. Machiavelli offered the following tribute to Lorenzo de’ Medici: “Of

Fortune and of God he was supremely loved, wherefore all his enterprises ended well and those of his enemies ill All the citizens mourned his death and all the princes of Italy.”¹⁶

THE BRIEF RULE OF PIERO DE' MEDICI

Lorenzo de' Medici's fears had proved true, for his son Piero lacked the courage and wisdom of his father, and was little match for Father Savonarola, the enemies of the Medicis, and the scheming of foreign rulers. In 1492, the year of Lorenzo de' Medici's death, Europe was going through a period of tremendous change. Pope Innocent VIII had also died, and was replaced by Pope Alexander VI, who proved not to be a friend to the Medicis. At the same time, the rulers of England, France, and Spain were building mighty empires.

Twenty-two-year-old Piero de' Medici was unable to recognize this shift in the balance of power, nor to understand that Florence and the other Italian city-states were rapidly becoming insignificant players in global politics. His father had warned of the threat posed by foreign nations, but his handsome, arrogant son did not take heed.

Piero de' Medici ignored the cautious foreign policies his father had advocated in his final years, preferring something bolder. He chose sides in a dispute between Milan and Naples, siding with Naples, and prompting the ruler of Milan to call upon the French king, Charles VIII, for aid.

France was quick to respond. In the late summer of 1494, a French army began its march across the Alps into Italy, where it was joined by forces from Milan. The French army was a terrifying force as it marched southward across Italy. The Italian city-states were accustomed to quick battles with each other, fought by small forces of hired soldiers. They were unprepared for the well-trained, heavily armed French army of some 60,000 men marching across their land. The French were a force with a highly skilled infantry and the best artillery in all of Europe, equipped with light, mobile cannons that fired iron rather than stone balls.¹⁷

Within a few weeks, French forces were marching into the Florentine territory of Tuscany. Rather than rallying his forces and urging unity among the Italian city-states, Piero de' Medici left Florence and traveled to the place where the French king had

camped. He quickly offered the French certain key fortresses in Florence as the terms of surrender.

The people of Florence were outraged at Piero de' Medici's cowardly actions. When he returned from the French camp to report on the peace treaty, the Signoria refused to allow him to enter the building. Instead, members rang the great bell outside that was used to summon the people of Florence in times of crisis. Unable to fight his way through the growing crowd, and fearing for his life, Piero de' Medici was forced to flee with his brother Giuliano. The crowd, when they learned of the surrender, rummaged through the palace, stealing its treasures. Cardinal Giovanni attempted to appease the crowd, but his efforts were in vain. Fearing for his life, the cardinal disguised himself and escaped, joining his brothers in exile.

For 60 years, the Medici family had ruled over Florence. Their name had symbolized power, and they had become a dominant force in Italy. Now, only two years after Lorenzo's death, the Medicis were forced out of Florence. They would spend the next 18 years in exile.

Test Your Knowledge

- 1 How was the engagement of Lorenzo de' Medici and Clarice Orsini celebrated?
 - a. A jousting match was held.
 - b. A boxing match was held.
 - c. A fox hunt was conducted.
 - d. A singing contest was conducted.
- 2 Which famous artist was inspired by Medici spectacles to create *Birth of Venus*?
 - a. Botticelli
 - b. Michelangelo
 - c. da Vinci
 - d. Machiavelli
- 3 Lorenzo de' Medici established dominance over which aspect(s) of Florentine life?
 - a. Politics
 - b. Diplomacy
 - c. Establishment of schools and libraries
 - d. All of the above
- 4 Lorenzo de' Medici understood the true threat to Italian city-states to come from
 - a. the pope.
 - b. foreign nations.
 - c. within.
 - d. the king.

- 5 Which famous artist was unofficially “adopted” by Lorenzo de’ Medici?
- a. Botticelli
 - b. Machiavelli
 - c. Michelangelo
 - d. Van Gogh

ANSWERS: 1. a; 2. a; 3. d; 4. b; 5. c



A Medici Pope



For 18 years, the sons of Lorenzo de' Medici were banished from Florence. With them was Giulio, the illegitimate son of Lorenzo's murdered brother Giuliano, who had been adopted by Lorenzo after Giuliano's death. When the Medicis were forced to flee for their lives, they had taken young Giulio de' Medici

with them, fearing for their cousin's safety. Eventually they separated. Cardinal Giovanni took Giulio and traveled throughout Europe. The youngest of the Medici brothers, Giuliano, spent time as a guest in various palaces in Italy and throughout Europe. The unlucky Piero de' Medici, still hoping to reclaim his family's name and power, allied himself with various political leaders, fighting with them and nearly always choosing the wrong side. He died in a battle in Naples, drowned in a river, and left behind two children—a son named Lorenzo and a daughter named Clarice.

In 1503, Pope Alexander VI died, and with this Medici enemy gone, Cardinal Giovanni felt safe to return to Rome with his cousin Giulio. He was again able to serve as cardinal under the new pope, Julius II.

Pope Julius II supported the Medicis and was willing to help them in their effort to reclaim their role in Florence. During their 18 years in exile, Florence had suffered through poor governments, corruption, the presence of the French, and a religious government set up by Father Savonarola that banned excess, luxury, and finery. Citizens of

Florence were called upon to discard their jewels, their fine clothes, and even their wigs by throwing them into large bonfires. Once Father Savonarola had purged Florence of its excesses, however, it was difficult for him to ignore the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, under Alexander VI, had been highly corrupt, and Florence joined with much of Europe in calling for a reformation of church policies.

Meanwhile, Pope Alexander VI was able to put pressure on a weak Signoria to call for Father Savonarola's trial on charges of heresy. He endured days of torture without renouncing his views before finally being executed in a public square.

Without a strong leader, Florence sank into chaos. Power changed hands many times. New constitutions were drafted and then overthrown. Those in power were increasingly corrupt. Florence was mismanaged, weak, and no longer a significant political player.

The new pope, Julius II, was determined to place Florence in the hands of his allies, the Medicis. Pope Julius II was disturbed that Italy had become a kind of battlefield for France, Spain, and Germany to



Father Girolamo Savonarola was found guilty on charges of heresy, a crime punishable by death. He was hanged on May 23, 1498, in a public square in Florence, shown here.

attempt to win land and power, and he understood that his own power depended on a stable Italy. He also was a skilled warrior with his own army of troops to command.

By 1512, the pope's troops were marching near Prato, about ten miles north of Florence. The

Florentine leadership dispatched a force, woefully unprepared for the challenge, which was quickly defeated, and the army turned toward Florence. Learning that Prato had collapsed, a number of Florentines formed a revolution in the city, blaming the shameful defeat on poor leadership and forcing the head of the government to resign. The rest of the government quickly sent a message to the pope's forces, expressing its willingness to allow the Medicis to return.

On September 1, 1512, Lorenzo de' Medici's sons Giovanni and Giuliano and their cousin Giulio—accompanied by their nephew, Pietro's son Lorenzo—rode back into Florence. They were welcomed by enthusiastic crowds of cheering Florentines who were tired of the years of chaos and corruption, and remembered the glory days that Florence had experienced under Medici rule. The Medicis had fled Florence as young men of 18, 16, and 15 respectively. They were now mature adults of 36, 34, and 33.

These Medici men conducted themselves with honor. Although they had been forced into exile, fearing for their lives, they made no effort to execute

or force into exile those who had been their enemies. When they returned to a family palace that was bare of its priceless collections of art and antiques, they demonstrated the same spirit of forgiveness that Lorenzo de' Medici had shown after the assassination attempt.

It was soon decided that the youngest of Lorenzo de' Medici's sons, Giuliano, would assume control of Florence. Cardinal Giovanni was anxious to return to Rome, and Giulio went with him. Shortly after the return of the Medicis, Pope Julius II died. Cardinal Giovanni wanted to be in Rome when the new pope was elected.

GIULIANO DE MEDICI'S RULE

During his years in exile, Cardinal Giuliano—who was known for his cheerful and intelligent personality—had been a welcome guest of many of the noble houses of Italy. He was talented, and had also proved his military skill. The decision to make him the Medici ruler in Florence—rather than Pietro's 20-year-old son, Lorenzo—was a wise one. Many still remembered Pietro de' Medici's cowardly surrender to France, and Lorenzo had the same

stubborn, inflexible personality as his father. Giuliano de' Medici, on the other hand, was generous, peaceful, diplomatic, and a great student of the arts—a man very similar, in fact, to his father.

Giuliano de' Medici demonstrated respect for his people by adopting the plain and simple style of dress then in fashion in Florence. He avoided any outward appearance of luxury, and even shaved off his beard, as facial hair was a foreign style in that part of Italy.

The hope of many Florentines was that, under Giuliano de' Medici, the city-state would once more recapture the glory it had known under Lorenzo, but Giuliano de' Medici's reign would unfortunately be cut short when, in March 1513, Giuliano's older brother, Giovanni, was elected pope.

POPE LEO X

The choice of 36-year-old Giovanni de' Medici as the new pope meant a time of great rejoicing in Florence. Giovanni de' Medici was the first Florentine to become pope, and most Florentines expected that Giovanni, or Pope Leo X as he was now known, would be quick to bring favors and



Once Giovanni de' Medici became Pope Leo X, he outlined a more ambitious plan to expand papal authority in Italy. Pope Leo is shown here with cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi.

benefits to his homeland. His speech on becoming pope certainly seemed to support this: “Since God has given us the Papacy, let us enjoy it.”¹⁸

Scholars of the Medicis have surprisingly different views of the family at the time that Leo X began his service as pope. Some view the new pope as an ambitious man, eager to instill his policies on Florence and exert his influence on other members of his family. Some view Giuliano de’ Medici as the villain of the history—a man too weak to confront his brother, and too pleasure-loving to exercise any real authority in Florence. Still others point to Giulio de’ Medici as the “power behind the pope”—a man who schemed to have his cousin named pope so that he could manipulate him and gain the rights to the kingdom.

There is, without a doubt, a bit of truth in each of these views of the three Medici men who shaped the family’s history in the early 1500s. Once Giovanni de’ Medici became Pope Leo X, he outlined a more ambitious plan to expand papal authority in Italy. The most logical place to begin to exercise this new authority was in the city where he was most beloved, Florence. The Medici then

ruling over Florence, Giuliano, instead was named “gonfaloniere of the papal forces,” a position requiring him to stay close to the pope and, consequently, to move to Rome.

Pope Leo X did not intend to directly rule Florence himself, however. Instead, his nephew

Choosing a Pope

The process of selecting a pope has changed little over the last 500 years, and the systems that were in place when members of the Medici family became heads of the Roman Catholic Church remain largely intact. When a pope dies, all of the cardinals (the most important priests in the Catholic Church) go to Rome to attend the funeral and choose from among themselves the man who will be the next pope.

The pope is chosen in one of three ways: by a unanimous voice vote of the cardinals; by a unanimous selection by the cardinals of anywhere from a 9-member to a 15-member committee, which then chooses a pope; or, most commonly, by ballot. In ballot voting, a morning meeting is scheduled within ten days of the pope’s death. The approximately 120 active cardinals (those under the age of 80) all write the name of one man on their ballot. After the votes

Lorenzo—the son of Pietro—became the unofficial leader of Florence. Pope Leo X remained in almost daily contact with Lorenzo, offering guidance and assisting him in choosing his advisors. Pope Leo X next turned to one of the territories of Italy that was rebelling against his authority,

are counted, the ballots are burned. If there is no winner, a chemical is added to the ballots to produce black smoke when they are burned. Another vote is taken, until a winner is produced. Then the ballots are burned without the chemical, producing white smoke. Observers watch the color of the smoke coming from the roof of the Vatican in St. Peter's Square in Rome to determine whether or not a pope has been chosen.

The man chosen is then asked if he accepts his election. If so, he then chooses the name he will use as pope. Finally, the oldest cardinal walks out onto the balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square and announces to those gathered below, "*Habemus papam.*" ("We have a pope.") The new pope is introduced, and he begins his service by offering a blessing.



the province of Urbino. The pope used both the papal and Florentine armies to attack Urbino, removing its duke from his throne, and instead naming young Lorenzo de' Medici as the new Duke of Urbino.

The previous generations of Medicis had furthered their ambitions through marriage, selecting members of noble families as spouses for their children. Pope Leo X set his ambitions even higher, arranging for the marriage of his brother Giuliano to the young aunt of the king of France, 17-year-old Philiberte of Savoy. The French king named him Duke of Nemours to honor the marriage. Giuliano de' Medici died, however, only a year later, at the age of 37, and was buried in San Lorenzo, where a statue by Michelangelo was placed over his tomb.

The Medici family had risen far from its early days as wealthy bankers. Now its members included dukes, and even a pope. Still the family's ambitions continued to grow. The new pope was determined to increase both his own influence and the influence of the Medici family. Unfortunately these two ambitions would not peacefully coexist.

LORENZO, DUKE OF URBINO

Lorenzo de' Medici, the new leader of Florence and Duke of Urbino, had experienced great tragedy during his early life. He had been only two years old when his family was forced into exile, and his childhood had been marked by his father's desperate efforts to reclaim his good name and power. When Lorenzo was only 11, his father had died, and when he was 21, his uncle had made him ruler of Florence.

Lorenzo de Medici's uncle, remembering the tragic events that had led to Medici exile, warned his young nephew to adopt a simple lifestyle in Florence, to remain respectful of the ways of the Florentines, and above all to avoid the arrogance that had led to his father's downfall. Apparently these instructions were difficult for a young man who had suddenly been given power over an entire city-state and granted a noble title. He was, after all, a young man who had been brought up on stories of the injustices bestowed upon his family by the Florentines.

The naming of Lorenzo de' Medici as Duke of Urbino also carried a hefty price tag. Francesco della Rovere, the man who had been Duke of

Urbino before the papal and Florentine armies overthrew him, had no intention of letting his land go without a fight.

Soon Lorenzo de' Medici would be elevated even higher. Pope Leo X determined that his nephew should be married to French royalty as a way to cement an alliance with France. The French king, Francois I, agreed to the marriage of Lorenzo de' Medici and Madeleine de la Tour d'Auverne, and the ceremony was a time of extraordinary extravagance in the court of France. The celebration lasted an entire month, after which the young couple returned to Florence. The Florentines welcomed the lovely young French princess, but Lorenzo de' Medici quickly offended Florentines by following the French tradition and growing a beard, as well as mimicking the more extravagant customs and clothing that had been the fashion in France. It was with mixed feelings that Florentine citizens celebrated the birth of Lorenzo and Madeleine's daughter Catherine.

An extraordinary future awaited the young baby who would be known as Catherine de' Medici. She would become queen of France, and the mother of

three kings, but the celebration of her birth quickly turned to mourning when her mother died as a result of complications following the birth, and her father died less than a month later. Pope Leo X would not allow Florence to slip out of Medici control. So he sent his cousin Giulio, now a cardinal, to manage Florence until a legitimate ruler could be found.

CARDINAL GIULIO

Giulio de' Medici had remained behind the scenes during the early years of the Medicis' return to power. He had served as an advisor to Pope Leo X, supported the efforts to install Lorenzo de' Medici as ruler of Florence, and had been an invaluable aide in the complicated politics of the Catholic Church. It was as administrator of Florence, however, that the illegitimate son of Giuliano de' Medici was finally able to allow his talents and skills to shine.

Giulio de' Medici quickly began changing many of Lorenzo de Medici's policies that had caused ill will and trouble in Florence. He ensured that Florence's finances were put into good order, he lowered the taxes on Florentines, and quickly took

steps to eliminate some of the corrupt influences that had begun to rise under Lorenzo de' Medici's rule.

At the same time, he remained a modest and simple man in public, doing his best to adapt to the ways of the Florentines and in all things to avoid giving offense. He frequently sought the advice of leading citizens in Florence. Within five months, Giulio de' Medici had skillfully mended ties, and had once more assured the support of Florence for Medici rule.

Meanwhile, both Giulio de' Medici and Pope Leo X worried about exactly who would continue the Medici rule after they were gone. Baby Catherine was the only legitimate heir to the family throne. The question was whether she could prove worthy and able to sustain Medici power.

Test Your Knowledge

- 1 Which of the sons of Lorenzo de' Medici was the youngest?
 - a. Lorenzo
 - b. Giuliano
 - c. Piero
 - d. Giovanni
- 2 How long did the Medici brothers spend in exile?
 - a. 25 years
 - b. 18 years
 - c. 40 years
 - d. 12 years
- 3 How did Guiliano de' Medici demonstrate respect for his people?
 - a. By growing his hair long
 - b. By sponsoring great artists
 - c. By organizing lavish festivals
 - d. By adopting a plain and simple style of dress
- 4 What was Lorenzo de' Medici's other title?
 - a. Pope Leo X
 - b. Gonfaloniere of Florence
 - c. Duke of Urbino
 - d. Cardinal Lorenzo

- 5 What title would Catherine de' Medici have?
- a. Queen of England
 - b. Queen of France
 - c. Princess of Florence
 - d. Duchess of Rome

ANSWERS: 1. a; 2. b; 3. d; 4. c; 5. b



Catherine de' Medici



Upon first meeting his infant great-niece, Pope Leo X said with a sigh, “She brings with her all the misfortunes of Greece!”¹⁹ Obviously someone had to be in charge of caring for young Catherine, but an even larger problem remained—the fortunes of the Medici family were now being entrusted to a baby girl.

Pope Leo X soon discovered that there were two other people who might have a claim on the Medici fortune, a young boy named Ippolito, thought to be the illegitimate son of Giuliano, and Alessandro, who was claimed to be the illegitimate son of Lorenzo, but was probably the illegitimate son of Cardinal Giulio, instead. While the pope debated how and what to do with these complicated family ties, all three children were sent to live with Cardinal Giulio in the Medici Palace in Florence.

Meanwhile, France and Spain began vying for power in Italy. The king of Spain, Charles V, met with Pope Leo X and signed an alliance with him, promising Milan—then under French control—to the pope, in exchange for his support in a war between France and Spain. When the conflict ended, the French had evacuated Milan and retreated toward the Alps. Pope Leo X was so excited by this news that he ordered a grand celebration. When the party ended, however, Leo X came down with a severe fever and he had the chills. On December 1, 1521, only three days after his joyful celebration, Pope Leo X was dead at the age of 45.

His successor was not an Italian, and his support came from the king of Spain. The new pope, Hadrian VI, had high hopes for reforming the Catholic Church, but within a year, he too died, as a result of a fever.

POPE CLEMENT VII

For seven weeks after the death of Pope Hadrian VI, the cardinals argued over who would be his successor. Finally on November 19, 1523, the new pope was named; it was Giulio de' Medici, who would now take the name Clement VII.

Pope Clement VII's first crisis was the question of who would rule over Florence. Catherine de' Medici was only four years old, and the two supposed sons of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici—Alessandro and Ippolito—were, at 13 and 15 years old respectively, still too young for such a responsibility. At first, Pope Clement VII appointed Cardinal Passerini as his representative in Florence, and, for three years, Cardinal Passerini administered the city-state under Pope Clement VII's direction.

At the same time, Pope Clement VII openly announced the existence of the two illegitimate

heirs to the Medici name, noting that Cardinal Passerini would govern for the boys only until they became old enough to assume the responsibility. Up until this point, the people of Florence had only heard rumors of the boys' existence. Confronted with the facts, the people were angered, both at the sudden revelation of two young Medicis who would be trained to rule them, and at the arrival of Cardinal Passerini, who proved to be a greedy and foolish administrator.

Meanwhile, a question of war would pose the next crisis for the Medicis. In 1527, France and Spain were, once more, at war over Italy. Pope Clement VII tried to play one side against the other, and found himself without allies when a Spanish-German army began its slow march down through Italy, toward Rome. The soldiers had not been paid for many months, nor had they been given adequate supplies. Their response was to seize everything they could, and each Italian town and village in turn was ransacked, its citizens attacked and killed.

By May 5, 1527, the Spanish-German army was camped outside Rome, and the next day the attack began. Pope Clement VII hid in his castle, as



In May 1527, German soldiers of fortune attacked the city of Rome as Pope Clement VII hid in his castle, and eventually escaped the city. Rome was destroyed and finally abandoned by the army after nine months, when the plague swept through the streets.

churches, palaces, and houses were all ransacked. The soldiers attacked anyone and everyone in their path. The pope's army was quickly defeated, and, for seven months, Pope Clement VII remained in hiding as his city was occupied. Finally, on

December 8, 1527, the pope was able to escape, disguised as a peddler. Rome was destroyed and finally abandoned by the army after nine months, when the bubonic plague swept through the streets.

Hearing the news of the capture of Rome, the Florentines determined that the time had come for them to overthrow the Medici government. They were not interested in being ruled by one of two boys who had emerged seemingly out of nowhere; nor were they willing to listen to the representative of a pope who was no longer in power. On March 19, 1527, the Medici family was once more banished from Florence.

A POPE IN EXILE

Pope Clement VII remained focused on recapturing power and ensuring the continuation of Medici rule. By October 1528, he was able to return to Rome, where he discovered a city in ruins. Half of the population had died, most as victims of disease and war. Most of the major buildings had been burned. Pope Clement VII realized that there was little left in Rome for him, but the Medici family fortune could still be revived in Florence.

Accordingly, he arranged a secret meeting with the Spanish emperor, Charles V, in Spain. The pope signed a treaty agreeing to assist the emperor in cementing his control over all of Italy, in exchange for one small piece of land—Florence. With Emperor Charles's army under his direction, Pope Clement VII was able to order an attack on Florence, in September 1529, with the aim of reinstating Medici power in the city-state. The conflict lasted for nearly 12 months, before Florence was finally forced to surrender in August 1530.

Florence would now be governed by a duke—none other than 20-year-old Alessandro de' Medici, the illegitimate son of Pope Clement VII. On May 1, 1532, Alessandro de' Medici summoned the members of Florence's Signoria to the Medici Palace and announced that, under the orders of Emperor Charles V, the Signoria was being abolished. Alessandro de' Medici would be the only ruler of Florence. The presence of the Spanish army ensured order, and the Florentines could do little to protest or question this change.

Pope Clement VII had achieved his aim—to reinstate Medici power in Florence—but Emperor

Charles V and his army ensured control. To gain Florence, Alessandro de' Medici had essentially made himself subservient to Emperor Charles V, throughout all of Italy.

Meanwhile, Pope Clement VII continued his schemes. King Henry VIII of England wished to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn. Henry VIII, a Catholic, needed the pope to agree to annul his first marriage. Queen Catherine, however, was the aunt of Emperor Charles V, and Pope Clement was not in a position to alienate Charles V by granting King Henry VIII's plea. Finally, in January 1533, Henry VIII married Anne Boleyn without the pope's blessing.

Pope Clement could not ignore this public act of defiance. Through Henry VIII's example, all of England was being encouraged to ignore the direction of the Catholic Church. In March 1534, the Church of England and the English parliament separately declared that the pope did not have supreme authority over England. From then on, the Church of England would be the sole religious authority in England. Pope Clement responded with a threat of excommunication against King Henry VIII, unless

he agreed to immediately return to Catherine of Aragon. Henry VIII refused, and Pope Clement VII was forced to excommunicate him. Under Pope Clement VII, the Church of England and the Church of Rome were formally and finally separated.

Less than two months later, on September 25, 1534, at the age of 56, Pope Clement VII died. Pope Clement's ambition had left the Catholic Church divided, Florence in turmoil, and the Medici name hated and feared, rather than honored. Any hope of restoring family honor, rested squarely on the shoulders of young Catherine de' Medici. The pope, in one of his final acts, had married her off to the youngest son of the king of France.

A YOUNG GIRL ALONE

Catherine de' Medici has become one of the best known of the Medicis. It is important to remember, however, that the powerful woman who became the queen of France spent most of her childhood alone and unwanted, a pawn in a power struggle between the people of Florence and the pope.

Only weeks after Catherine de' Medici's birth, both of her parents were dead. At the time, she was

believed to be the sole heir to the Medici fortune. At six months old, she was taken to Rome, where her great-uncle, Pope Leo X, oversaw her care while she lived with an aunt. She lived there until she was six years old, when her uncle had replaced her great-uncle as pope, becoming Clement VII. As noted earlier, Rome soon became a very dangerous place and, in 1525, the young girl was sent back to Florence, to live under the supervision of Cardinal Passerini in the family palace with Ippolito and Alessandro.

When Catherine de' Medici was eight years old, Rome was attacked and Pope Clement VII was forced into hiding. Very quickly, Florence turned against the Medicis, and, as her relatives fled, Catherine de' Medici was seized by representatives of the government and imprisoned. Government officials hoped to use the eight-year-old girl to negotiate with the pope, once he fled Rome.

The young girl was sent to a convent, and there, behind the walls of the religious community of nuns, Catherine lived for three years, prevented from communicating with any friends or relatives. The nuns focused on educating the young girl, as

well as teaching her proper behavior and manners. Despite her status as a political prisoner, this was a happy and peaceful time for Catherine de' Medici. She was kept ignorant of the political squabbling in Florence, and the wars raging through Italy. The nuns grew so fond of her, that, by 1530, the government began to worry that support for the Medici family might be growing within the convent walls.

On July 20, 1530, in the middle of the night, three representatives of the government knocked on the convent door and demanded that Catherine de' Medici be turned over to them. She was convinced that they wanted to kill her. After much discussion with the nuns, it was agreed that Catherine de' Medici would be allowed to stay in the convent until morning. Quickly she put on the traditional dress of the nuns and cut off her long hair. When her escort reappeared in the morning, she refused to go with him. She claimed that she had decided to become a nun and dared them to carry off a nun by force from the convent walls. Finally they took her away, and the nuns cried bitterly. She was not murdered, but instead taken to another convent where, it was thought, she was less likely to stir up support for her family.

Catherine de' Medici's exile did not last long. By August 1530, Florence had surrendered to the troops of Pope Clement VII. Alessandro de' Medici was installed as Florence's ruler, and Catherine de' Medici was summoned to Rome to be with her cousin Ippolito, now 22 years old, and her uncle, who quickly busied himself with finding an appropriate husband for his 12-year-old niece.

Pope Clement VII finally chose the second son of King Francis I of France, a rather unimpressive young man named Henry, to be Catherine's husband. By the time she was 14, Catherine de' Medici's marriage arrangements had been finalized, and, in September 1533, she set out for France in a grand procession accompanied by her uncle.

On October 28, 1533, Catherine de' Medici and Henry of Orleans were married in Marseilles, France. The pope performed the marriage. The bride wore a cloak of dark blue velvet lined with ermine fur, and a crown on her head.

Despite the grandeur, however, the marriage did not mark a time of rejoicing. The people of France were furious at the choice of someone who was not a member of a royal family—and was a foreigner—



Catherine de' Medici (shown here) married Henry of Orleans, son of the king of France, on October 28, 1533. She was not well liked, however, by the people of France.

as a wife for the son of their king. Catherine de' Medici, in French eyes, was merely the daughter of some wealthy bankers whose uncle happened to be the pope. They described her sarcastically as “that

Italian woman,” and, while her father-in-law admired her intelligence, her passion for hunting, and her witty conversation, her new husband ignored her.

A STRANGER IN A STRANGE COUNTRY

Within a year of her marriage, Pope Clement VII was dead, and Catherine de' Medici was deprived of her most politically important relative. Married to a man who did his best to avoid her, in a country where she was hated, she maintained her self-control and poise.

The emotions of the French people grew even more intense, however, when in August 1536, nearly three years after Catherine de' Medici's marriage to Henry of Orleans, his older brother, the crown prince, died suddenly. Rumors quickly spread that Catherine de' Medici, “the Italian woman,” had poisoned her brother-in-law so that her husband would inherit the throne. King Francis I quickly made it clear, however, that these rumors would not be tolerated.

Catherine de' Medici's pain increased when her husband began a very public love affair with Diane de Poitiers, an older woman. Soon it was Diane de Poitiers who was being honored at court, traveling at Henry's side, and hosting parties with him at one of

the palaces he bought for her, while Catherine was left alone and humiliated.

By the time she was 23 years old, Catherine de' Medici had been married for nine years, and during that time she had remained childless. Many began to suggest that Henry should divorce her and marry someone else—someone who would be capable of bearing children to continue the royal family. She quickly went to the king, and according to one report, told him:

she had heard that it was his intention to give another woman as wife to her husband, and since it had not, up to the present time, pleased God to grant her the grace to have sons, it seemed to her quite proper that he did not think it best to wait any longer to provide properly for the succession of heirs for so great a kingdom.²⁰

The king replied:

My daughter, have no fear. Since God has willed that you should be my daughter-in-law and wife of the Dauphin, I do not wish to make any

change and perhaps it will please Almighty God in this matter to grant to you and to me the gift we so much long for.²¹

Within a year, King Francis's prediction proved true. Catherine de' Medici gave birth to a son named Francis, after his grandfather. Over the next 12 years, she gave birth to nine more children. She had, in all, four sons—three of whom would become kings of France—and three daughters; three other children died as infants.

QUEEN OF FRANCE

In March 1545, when King Francis I died, Henry became King Henry II, and, at the age of 28, Catherine de' Medici was now queen of France. The new king had grown wiser and more mature as he aged, and now, at 29, he was a serious and popular ruler. Catherine de' Medici was deeply in love with her husband, and in letters later written to her sons and daughters, her pain during this period is revealed, as she dealt with the constant knowledge that her husband did not care for her in the same way.



Henry of Orleans became King Henry II in March 1545, when King Francis I died, and thus Catherine de' Medici became queen of France.

Catherine de' Medici focused on the education of her children. Her sons were given tutors as they grew older, and she also continued to educate her daughters, who would become noteworthy for their extraordinary intelligence. For many years, Catherine de' Medici remained quietly in the background, appearing

A Mother's Advice



Catherine de' Medici wrote many letters during her years as a young bride, a queen, and still later, as Queen Mother. This correspondence was often written for political or diplomatic reasons, to explain a position, request aid, or urge a particular response. The most honest and revealing of her letters, however, were those she wrote to her daughter Elizabeth. Shortly after the death of her husband and her oldest son, she wrote to Elizabeth, reminding her of the sacrifices she had made for the sake of her marriage and kingdom, and the importance of faith:

For this reason, my dear daughter, recommend yourself well to God, because you have seen me as contented as you are, without a thought of ever having any other trouble than not to be loved as much as I wanted to be by the King

in public only for formal state occasions, such as the wedding, in April 1558, of her oldest son, Francis, to Mary, Queen of Scots, and the June 1559 wedding of her oldest daughter, Elizabeth, to Philip II of Spain.

As part of the latter wedding, a grand jousting tournament was held. During the ceremonial joust,

your father, who honored me more than I merited, but I loved him so much that I had always fear, as you know, in many ways, and God has taken him away from me. For this my dear daughter, remember me and let me serve as an example, so that you do not trust so much in the love which you bear your husband and in the honor and the ease which you have at this present moment, as to forget to recommend yourself to Him who can continue your happiness and also when it pleases Him put you into the state in which I am: for I would sooner die than see you there, from the fear that you could not carry so much trouble as I have had and still have, which I am sure without His help I would not know how to carry.

* Paul Van Dyke, *Catherine de Médicis*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922, vol. I, p. 107.



to the horror of all the guests, King Henry II was accidentally wounded in the eye. Ten days later, he died. At the age of 40, Catherine de' Medici was a widow, and Queen Mother.

For the next 30 years, Catherine de' Medici served as Queen Mother, as three of her sons succeeded to the throne. First was the oldest, Francis II, who became king at the age of 16. Francis II's reign coincided with a growing religious conflict in Europe between followers of a new religion, known as Protestantism, and Roman Catholics. In France, the conflict would erupt into a religious war.

Francis II was young and often sick, and he entrusted much of the management of France to two of his wife's powerful uncles, the Guises. The Guises were fiercely opposed to the Protestant movement, and began a campaign of persecution against followers. Catherine de' Medici was horrified by the beatings and torture. She advocated a policy of religious tolerance, believing that a war over religion would mean devastation for France, but she had little power over King Francis and his advisors.

Francis II's reign lasted only 17 months. He died on December 5, 1560, and was succeeded by his

younger brother Charles, who was only ten. Because of his youth, Catherine de' Medici was named queen regent of France. She quickly acted to bring an end to all religious persecution, ordering that Protestants should be freely allowed to practice their religion in France. She was criticized by Roman Catholics for her tolerant policy. By May 1562, France's first religious war had begun. It lasted nearly a year, ending only as England threatened to invade France and Catherine de' Medici was able to unite the French to drive off the invaders.

By the time he was 14, Charles was ready to assume the duties of king, and he was installed as King Charles IX in the spring of 1564. Catherine de' Medici accompanied him on a tour of France, introducing him to the people in the more remote areas of his kingdom. Later, returning to Paris, she continued to focus on the simmering religious conflict. She became the first member of the French royal family to live in the palace of the Louvre, the construction of which had been started by her father-in-law and completed near the end of her husband's life. She also oversaw the construction of the famous palace of the Tuileries, connecting it with

the Louvre by a long gallery. Today they are no longer connected, but instead separated by a beautiful park.

For four years, France remained relatively peaceful, but in September 1567, a second religious war broke out, following an attempt by Protestants to seize young King Charles IX and murder him. For six months, fighting raged between Protestants and Roman Catholics, until a tentative peace treaty was signed. The treaty endured for only five months, before a third religious war was once more dividing the citizens of France.

The war allowed religious anger to rise to an even greater intensity. Rumors reached Paris of Protestants tearing apart holy Catholic cathedrals and destroying precious religious symbols. Catholics responded with fury, angrily denouncing Catherine de' Medici, who had attempted to legalize tolerance for Protestantism. As the violence grew, Catherine de' Medici ordered priests to read from their pulpits the law demanding religious tolerance, but the priests refused.

Finally, by August 1570, Catherine de' Medici had once more established peace between the two sides. She quickly turned her attention to arranging

marriages for her children. The unions were meant to demonstrate her desire for peace and tolerance. Her son Charles IX was married to Elizabeth of Austria, the daughter of the Austrian emperor who also advocated a policy of religious tolerance. Her daughter Marguerite was married to Henry of Navarre, the son of one of Navarre's most prominent Protestants. (Navarre was a province of France.) Finally she began arrangements to marry her son Henry to Elizabeth, the queen of England. This last marriage never was finalized, however.

The marriage plans, rather than ensuring tolerance, further angered those who perceived Catherine de' Medici's attempts to marry the king's siblings to Protestants as a sign that France was becoming a Protestant nation. In August 1572, violence once more broke out, this time resulting in a horrific massacre of Protestants in Paris. War quickly followed, and the religious conflict endured for 12 months, ending only with a temporary truce, before a fifth war broke out in February 1574.

As war raged on, Charles IX died. He was succeeded by his brother Henry III, who was then 23. While Henry III reigned, it was his mother, now



One of Catherine de' Medici's sons became France's King Charles IX. King Charles (shown here) married Elizabeth of Austria, the daughter of the Austrian emperor who also advocated a policy of religious tolerance.

in her 60s, who traveled around France attempting to make peace. Catherine de' Medici's efforts were, however, only temporarily successful. War again broke out, and Paris was taken by ardent supporters of the Guises, who erected barricades in the city and forced the king and his wife, and Catherine de' Medici, to take refuge in the Louvre. Finally, as revolution threatened, King Henry and his wife escaped, while Catherine de' Medici set out across Paris, passing through the barricades, to meet with the leaders of the opposition. She was able to arrange a peaceful settlement to the conflict—although the revolutionaries were granted enormous power—and King Henry was able to return to Paris.

Catherine de' Medici's efforts at peacemaking were physically and emotionally exhausting. When she learned that King Henry had authorized the assassination of the leader of the revolutionaries, she knew that war would, once more, be the result. This time, however, she would not live to make peace. She died on January 5, 1589, at the age of 69.

Even after her death, Catherine de' Medici remained a polarizing figure. Many criticized her for

her supposed role in the religious wars, arguing that her policies contributed to, rather than alleviated, the conflicts. She was a suspect in many plots, and rumors of her role in the murders of many leading figures continued for centuries after her death. She was denounced by both Protestants and Catholics. Among the few who kindly remembered her, her doctor noted:

We all remain without light, or counsel, or consolation, and to tell the truth, with her died what kept us alive. From now on we must turn our thoughts elsewhere and find some other support. The kingdom will suffer more than is believed, and the King remains without the most faithful and necessary support that he had.²²

Test Your Knowledge

- 1 Which countries were vying for power in Florence during Medici rule?
 - a. France and Spain
 - b. Germany and England
 - c. England and France
 - d. Spain and England
- 2 Which member of the Medici family became known as Pope Clement VII?
 - a. Lorenzo de' Medici
 - b. Giuliano de' Medici
 - c. Alessandro de' Medici
 - d. Giuilo de' Medici
- 3 Which Italian city was captured by Spanish-German forces during Medici rule?
 - a. Venice
 - b. Florence
 - c. Rome
 - d. Pisa
- 4 Catherine de' Medici spent part of her childhood
 - a. in an art school.
 - b. in a convent.
 - c. at the Vatican.
 - d. in a hospital.

- 5 How many children did Catherine de' Medici have?
- a. Ten
 - b. Three
 - c. Twelve
 - d. Six

ANSWERS: 1. a; 2. d; 3. c; 4. b; 5. a



A Dynasty's Decline



The death of Catherine de' Medici effectively brought an end to Medici power in France. The struggles of the Medici family in Italy, specifically in Florence, however, had continued throughout Catherine de' Medici's life.

When Catherine de' Medici left Italy for France to be married, Alessandro de' Medici was ruling in Florence,

while her cousin Ippolito had been called by Pope Clement VI to Rome to serve as a cardinal and his aide. He was with the pope in 1534 when he died.

Alessandro de' Medici's rule over Florence marked a period of tragedy in the city. He was a tyrant, who demonstrated complete disregard for the people he governed and took every opportunity to use his position for his own personal gain. He was well aware that the people of Florence hated him, and he feared that some might make an attempt to replace him with the better-loved, more attractive Ippolito de' Medici.

In 1535, Ippolito de' Medici was traveling through Naples to Tunis, to meet with Emperor Charles V. His mission, made at the request of many in Florence, was to plead with the emperor that he might be made Duke of Florence, rather than Alessandro de' Medici. Before he could complete the journey, however, he was dead, the victim of poisoning. Most believed that Alessandro de' Medici was responsible.

Less than two years later, Alessandro himself was assassinated. The 24-year-old duke was murdered while lying in his bed at the palace. His killer had been hired by a distant cousin of Alessandro's,



Alessandro de' Medici's rule over Florence marked a period of tragedy in the city. He was not well liked, demonstrating complete disregard for the people he governed and taking every opportunity to use his position for his own personal gain.

who decided that Alessandro's tyrannical rule of Florence must be brought to an end.

With this act of violence, the reign over Florence by the descendants of Cosimo de' Medici came to an end. Florence was without a ruler. While the family of Cosimo de' Medici had no other male descendants, there was, however, another branch of the Medici family in Florence. If we look back in history to the place where Medici rule truly began, with Giovanni de' Medici, we remember that Giovanni had two sons—Cosimo, whose descendants we have followed up until now, and a younger son, Lorenzo.

Cosimo de' Medici's descendants were the high achievers in the family. They were the skilled bankers and diplomats, the popes and princesses. Lorenzo de' Medici and his descendants had remained in the background—many of them working in the family banks, many of them quite wealthy, but still followers rather than leaders. With the death of Alessandro de' Medici, things began to change.

SON OF A WARRIOR

As supporters of the Medicis looked to the other branch of the family for a possible successor to

Alessandro, the most obvious candidate was 17-year-old Cosimo. Cosimo de' Medici was the only son of Giovanni de' Medici, who had been an extraordinarily successful military commander, serving under Pope Clement VII. Giovanni de' Medici had died as a result of wounds suffered during battle, and was celebrated as a patriotic hero for his service. Young Cosimo was also distantly related to the other side of the family, through his mother.

With a father who was a war hero and family connections to both branches of the Medicis, young Cosimo was a logical choice to become duke, which he did in 1537. He ruled as duke for nearly 40 years, becoming known as Cosimo I—to distinguish him from the Cosimo of several generations earlier, known as Cosimo il Vecchio or “the elder.” Under Cosimo I, Florence would grow in territory with the acquisition of Siena. Later, in 1569, Pope Pius V would name Cosimo I as the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Cosimo I proved a worthy choice as successor to the Medici power. He was hard-working, firm, and shrewd. He married a Spanish princess, Eleanora of Toledo, and became a father to ten children. He also, through his marriage, gained a Spanish

army, which aided him in his efforts to secure and expand Florence.

Cosimo I followed in the family tradition of patronizing the arts, and supervised the construction of a series of public buildings, designed to centralize the many government offices that, up until that time, had been scattered throughout the city. They became known as the “Offices,” or, in Italian, *Uffizi*, and today the Uffizi galleries house an impressive collection of art. Having seen how quickly previous Medicis had fallen victim to assassinations and political revolts, Cosimo I took steps to cement his own power. He hired and trained expert guards to protect him from attack, and was always moving about the city wearing armor beneath his clothes, and carrying a knife. Fearing attack, he moved his family from the Medici Palace to a huge fortress on the other side of the Arno River, known as Pitti Palace.

He publicized his own accomplishments and those of his family, commissioning grand paintings to celebrate the achievements and courage of the Medicis, particularly his branch of the Medicis. Under Cosimo de’ Medici’s sponsorship, Florence’s



Cosimo de' Medici, the only son of Giovanni de' Medici, continued Medici rule when Alessandro de' Medici was killed. Cosimo de' Medici proved to be hard working and shrewd. He was a worthy successor to the Medici ruling dynasty.

wool and silk trades once more began to flourish, and new roads and harbors were built.

In the fall of 1562, Cosimo de' Medici's wife and two of his sons died of malaria, during a trip to Pisa. He never fully recovered from this tragedy. He placed his remaining children in important positions, either through marriage—his oldest son, Francis, was married to the sister of Emperor Maximilian II of Austria—or through appointments to the Catholic Church. His fourth son, Ferdinand, was named a cardinal at the age of 14. After 37 years of firm reign over Florence, Cosimo I died on April 21, 1574, at the age of 55. He had reshaped Florence into a stronger state, built up its army and navy, developed its industries, and reorganized its government. His rule was often heavy-handed, but he left the city-state much more powerful than it had been when he first assumed control. Cosimo de' Medici represents the final high point of Medici power. The end of his reign marks a sharp decline in the family's fortunes and in the quality of its leaders.

THE DECLINE

Cosimo de' Medici's oldest son, Francis I, had actually

begun to govern Florence during the final four years of his father's life. His 13-year rule was weak and incompetent, and corruption quickly began to mark the government. Crime rose and violence increased.

Cosimo I had focused his attention and energy on developing Tuscany. Francis I, instead, focused much time and money on his passion, science, and often held government meetings in his laboratory, while performing experiments. One of Francis de' Medici's most notable accomplishments was the transformation of the Uffizi from government offices to an artistic gallery, placing much of the Medici family art on display there. Francis de' Medici died in October 1587, and although he had fathered six children, only two, neither of them male, survived. With his death, rule over Florence passed to his younger brother, Ferdinand, who was a cardinal in Rome, and who had disagreed with his brother on practically every point.

FERDINAND I AND COSIMO II

Upon the death of Francis de' Medici, his brother Ferdinand decided to abandon his religious calling to assume the throne of Tuscany. Ferdinand I, as he

was now known, determined that Tuscany should abandon its recent policy of siding with Spain in any conflicts, and instead should establish closer ties to France. Ferdinand I had maintained a relatively close relationship with his distant cousin Catherine de' Medici and in 1587 she agreed to his request to marry her favorite granddaughter, Princess Christine of Lorraine, who was then 22. It would be several years, however, before the marriage could take place. France was in the midst of its ongoing series of religious wars, and Princess Christine remained by Catherine de' Medici's side during her final illness and death. Finally, in the spring of 1589, the wedding took place; the celebration lasted for a month.

Princess Christine had been raised by her grandmother following the death of her mother, and she was intelligent, spirited, and loved, both in France and in Tuscany. She proved to be a good wife, and Ferdinand ruled for 22 years. During his time in power, a sense of order and dignity was restored to the throne, following the corrupt years under Francis. He increased the size of the navy, and like many in his family, was a great sponsor of the arts.

He was the father of eight children, and died on February 7, 1609, at the age of 60.

Ferdinand de' Medici was succeeded by his oldest son, another Cosimo, known as Cosimo II. He was 19 when he became Grand Duke of Tuscany, and both his father and mother had trained him to be tolerant, generous, and friendly. He and his young wife were enthusiastically supported in Tuscany, and he was determined to launch a new age in Florence. Much as his earlier ancestors had focused on making Florence a center for art, Cosimo II was determined that Florence should become a leader in scientific research.

Cosimo II became a sponsor of the great scientist Galileo Galilei, who had been his mathematics teacher. Cosimo II appointed Galileo to the position of "Chief Mathematician to the Grand Duke," and gave him a villa in Florence and an annual salary that left him free to continue his research. For 23 years, Galileo developed the discoveries that would earn him a place as one of science's greatest pioneers. He invented the telescope during the first year of Cosimo II's reign, and later developed his theory that earth did not form the center of the universe,



Cosimo II sponsored scientist Galileo Galilei (shown here). Cosimo II appointed Galileo to the position of "Chief Mathematician to the Grand Duke," and gave him a villa in Florence and an annual salary.

but was merely one relatively small planet in the solar system.

Cosimo II was the final banker of the Medici family. He closed the family banks after he became Grand Duke of Tuscany, believing that a conflict of interest was created when the ruler of Tuscany was also its chief financier of trade and commerce.

Cosimo II might have been a great ruler, but he became severely ill at the age of 24 and never fully recovered. He died on February 28, 1620, at the age of 30, leaving behind his wife and eight children. His will specified that his mother and wife would serve as joint regents of Tuscany, until his oldest son, Ferdinand II—only ten at the time of his father's death—was old enough to serve as Grand Duke of Tuscany.

FERDINAND II

The two women who became joint regents of Tuscany, Grand Duchess Christine and Grand Duchess Maria Maddalena, were good women who, sadly, lacked good instincts and sense for governing. They loved splendor and celebrations, and quickly began a period in which the court of Tuscany was notable for its elaborate clothing, extravagant parties, and excessive spending. The eight years in which they oversaw Tuscany, until Ferdinand II came of age, were a time in which much of the Medici fortune was spent, and generous sums were granted to religious orders and monasteries, while the people of Florence sank into poverty.

Even after Ferdinand II became Grand Duke in 1628, his grandmother and mother still maintained considerable influence over the policies of the government. He quickly came into conflict with Pope Urban VIII, who was determined to demonstrate his power by attacking one of Florence's most famous citizens.

From 1609 to 1632, Galileo had been busily developing the scientific theories that would later make him famous. He had made important discoveries about gravity, astronomy, momentum, and time. His theory that the earth revolved around the sun, however, made him a target for papal questioning. In 1616, this theory was condemned by the members of the Inquisition, and he was forced to agree to avoid further discussion of this idea. For the next 17 years, Galileo continued to be the target of religious criticism. By 1633, he was again called before the members of the Inquisition in Rome, charged with having broken his promise. The pope charged that Galileo's theory directly contradicted the Bible, and the 70-year-old scientist was threatened with torture. He was forced to say that his theories were false and was kept as a prisoner.



Galileo, shown here presenting his telescope to the Venetian senate, was persecuted for his theory that the earth revolved around the sun. He was forced to say that his theories were false and was kept as a prisoner.

Ferdinand II had an opportunity to denounce the pope's actions and stand firmly by the man his father had named as "Chief Mathematician to the Grand Duke"—the man who had patiently taught himself and his father, and who shared his extraordinary scientific discoveries with all of Tuscany. Instead Ferdinand II chose the easier path, bowing to the will of the pope and refusing to support Galileo.

Some scholars suggest that Ferdinand II's unwillingness to stand up for Galileo marked the fall of the

Medicis, and the end of the Renaissance in Florence. The family that had once supported new thinking and new discoveries—in art, sculpture, architecture, and science—now bowed to religious pressure and allowed extraordinary talent to be suppressed.

THE END OF A DYNASTY

The grand dukes who followed were weaker men, and their time of rule over Tuscany was a time of decline for the Medici family. In 1670, Ferdinand II died, and his son, 28-year-old Cosimo III, took the throne. While Cosimo III was officially ruling, his mother—Grand Duchess Vittoria—was the power behind the throne. She constantly interfered and offered advice, replacing the officials and advisors. While Cosimo III's reign was marked by religious intolerance and weakened government, it was also noteworthy for its length. He ruled Tuscany for more than 50 years, from 1670 to 1723, and during this period citizens were subjected to strict codes of morality and severe punishment, for even the most minor of offenses. He adopted a short-sighted policy toward defense, refusing to properly fund or train Tuscany's military.

Cosimo III's cruel treatment of his citizens was mirrored in his bullying, intolerant attitude toward his sons. He forced his two sons into marriages with wives who were ill-suited to their husbands' personalities, and refused to allow them to participate in any way in the government. Both marriages produced no children, and, as Cosimo III grew older, the question of how Medici rule would continue became critical. In 1713, Cosimo III's oldest son, Ferdinand, died at the age of 50. After his death, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and the senate passed a law stating that, should Cosimo III's second son, Giovanni Gastone, die without an heir, then Cosimo's daughter, Anna Maria Luisa, would take the throne.

On October 31, 1723, when Cosimo III died, his son Gian Gastone took the throne, and, with his sister, moved into the Pitti Palace. Given he and his widowed sister's lack of children, it was not surprising that the question of succession became of international interest. Spain and Austria were both eager to obtain control of Italy, and their allies—England, Holland, and France—were soon drawn into the conflict. Tuscany was viewed as the prize.

Finally a peace treaty was signed in October 1735 that, when ratified in January 1736, became known as the Peace of Vienna. In the terms of the

Galileo

Galileo Galilei was born on February 15, 1564, in Pisa, Italy. He was the first child of Vincenzo Galilei, a music teacher from Florence, and Giulia Ammanati. When Galileo was eight, his family moved to Florence, but Galileo remained in Pisa for two years, in the care of a relative, before rejoining his family.

When he was old enough to be educated, he was sent away to a monastery southeast of Florence. Young Galileo liked the life there enough to consider becoming a monk, but his father had decided that Galileo would become a doctor, and he ordered his son to return to Florence, where he continued his schooling. In 1581, Galileo returned to Pisa to enroll in the university and begin his training to become a doctor, but he quickly found that his true interest was in mathematics.

Galileo became a teacher of mathematics. He was named the chair of mathematics at the University of Pisa in 1589, later taking a better-paying position at the University of Padua.

In the early 1600s, Galileo began experiments that would result in his creation of a telescope—which he called a *perspicillum*—superior to those that had previously been created. He used it on the sky at

peace agreement, upon the death of Gian Gastone, the Grand Duke of Tuscany would be given to the emperor of Austria's daughter, Maria Theresa. In

night, discovering new bodies and formations, including four small objects orbiting Jupiter, which he named “the Medicean stars.” (They were actually moons, but this was discovered later.) The name—and the loan of one of his new telescopes—impressed Grand Duke Cosimo II, who named him the chief mathematician of Tuscany.

Galileo continued to make numerous important discoveries while being supported by the Medicis, but his theories would bring him into conflict with Pope Urban VIII, and ultimately to trial under the Inquisition. Galileo was condemned to life in prison, but the sentence was ultimately lessened to allow him to return to his home, where he spent the rest of his days under house arrest.

Galileo died in early 1642, suffering the public embarrassment of the charges of heresy made against him. It was not until October 31, 1992, some 350 years after his death, that Pope John Paul II made a speech, noting that errors had been made in the case of Galileo. He did not, however, say that the Catholic Church had been wrong to prosecute Galileo for his belief that the earth rotates around the sun.

exchange, France would receive the state of Lorraine on its western border.

Gian Gastone was horrified by the way the European powers were carving up his land before he was even dead, but his protests were ignored. Austrian troops arrived in Tuscany, and upon Gian Gastone's death, on July 9, 1737, Tuscany left Medici hands forever. The Medici family's ruling dynasty came to an end with the death of its last male member.

A RENAISSANCE FAMILY

For more than three centuries, the Medici family helped shape the fate of Florence. From a middle-class family of bankers, they became royalty, transforming their base of power from a few banks in Florence to a banking empire that dominated Italian commerce, and expanding their rule to encompass all of Tuscany.

The Medicis were extraordinary not simply for their rise, but for the number of exceptional, powerful leaders the family produced. There was a clear inheritance among many of the Medici men—and some of the women—that resulted in an ability to

become the right ruler at the right place and time. There were, of course, weak and corrupt rulers, as well, but for any family to dominate a single city-state for so long, during such a period of change and turmoil, is exceptional.

Perhaps most important, the Medicis supported, nurtured, and funded others of extraordinary talents—artists, sculptors, architects, and scientists who, for a time, made Florence the center of the Renaissance. The Medicis encouraged new ways of looking at the world, and brought the talents of Michelangelo, Botticelli, Galileo, and countless others to light.

The legacy of the Medicis is still clearly visible throughout Florence. The homes of the Medicis—Medici Palace and Pitti Palace—still stand as evidence of the powerful family that once resided within their walls. The Uffizi galleries offer ample evidence of the importance of Medici support for the arts. Throughout the world, the masterpieces created by artists whom the Medicis sponsored continue to provide for contemporary viewers, a sense of what life was like during the age of the Medicis.

Test Your Knowledge

- 1 What event effectively brought an end to Medici power in France?
 - a. The death of Lorenzo de' Medici
 - b. The death of Catherine de' Medici
 - c. The start of the French Revolution
 - d. The end of the Renaissance
- 2 Who was the most obvious candidate as a successor to Alessandro de' Medici?
 - a. Catherine de' Medici
 - b. Piero de' Medici
 - c. Cosimo de' Medici
 - d. Giovanni de' Medici
- 3 How many children did Cosimo I have?
 - a. Ten
 - b. Six
 - c. Three
 - d. Five
- 4 Who did Cosimo II sponsor?
 - a. Machiavelli
 - b. Botticelli
 - c. Michelangelo
 - d. Galileo Galilei

- 5 What are the names of the Medicis' two homes?
- a. Pitti Palace and Medici Palace
 - b. Florence Palace and Medici Palace
 - c. Uffizi Palace and Medici Palace
 - d. Pazzi Palace and Medici Palace

ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. c; 3. a; 4. d; 5. a

CHRONOLOGY & TIMELINE

- 1360** Giovanni de' Medici is born.
- 1389** Giovanni's son Cosimo de' Medici is born.
- 1393** Giovanni de' Medici forms his own bank in Rome.
- 1421** Giovanni de' Medici becomes gonfaloniere in Florence.
- 1429** Giovanni de' Medici dies and is succeeded by his son Cosimo.
- 1433** Cosimo de' Medici and his family are forced to leave Florence; they are welcomed back within a year.
- 1449** Lorenzo de' Medici is born (Cosimo's first grandson).
- 1464** Cosimo de' Medici dies and is succeeded by his son Piero.

1434 Though lacking an official title, Cosimo de' Medici becomes a political force in Florence

1523 Giulio de' Medici becomes Pope Clement VII

1488 Michelangelo is sponsored by the Medici family

1430

1478 Pazzi Conspiracy sparks assassination attempt on Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Giuliano, on April 26; Giuliano is killed

1513 Giovanni de' Medici becomes Pope Leo X

CHRONOLOGY & TIMELINE

- 1469** Piero de' Medici dies and is succeeded by his son Lorenzo.
- 1478** Pazzi Conspiracy sparks assassination attempt on Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Giuliano on April 26; Giuliano de' Medici is killed.
- 1479** Pope Sixtus IV excommunicates all of Florence; war begins; Lorenzo de' Medici travels to Naples in December to negotiate peace.
- 1480** Peace agreement with Naples concluded in April; Lorenzo de' Medici returns to Florence in triumph; Lorenzo's son Piero is born.

1569 Cosimo I is named the Grand Duke of Tuscany by Pope Pius V

1737 Gian Gastone de' Medici dies on July 8, bringing an end to reign of Medicis over Florence

1740

1547 Catherine de' Medici becomes queen of France

1633 Galileo is summoned before the Inquisition; Ferdinand II drops his support of his former tutor

CHRONØLOGY

- 1485** Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola begins to preach against the Medicis.
- 1488** Michelangelo is sponsored by the Medici family.
- 1489** Lorenzo de' Medici's 14-year-old son Giovanni is named the youngest cardinal in history.
- 1492** Lorenzo de' Medici dies on April 9; he is succeeded by his son Piero.
- 1494** Piero de' Medici surrenders to French army and is forced to flee Florence.
- 1503** Piero de' Medici dies.
- 1512** Giovanni and Giuliano de' Medici are aided by Pope Julius II in retaking Florence.
- 1513** Giovanni de' Medici becomes Pope Leo X.
- 1516** Pietro de' Medici's son Lorenzo becomes Duke of Urbino.
- 1519** Catherine de' Medici is born (daughter of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino) and quickly orphaned; Cosimo de' Medici (who will become Cosimo I) is born.
- 1523** Giulio de' Medici becomes Pope Clement VII.
- 1527** Rome is sacked and Pope Clement VII forced into hiding; Florence overthrows the Medici reign and Alessandro and Ippolito are forced into exile.
- 1529** The army of Pope Clement VII retakes Florence.
- 1532** Alessandro de' Medici abolishes the Florentine republic and is named Duke of Florence; his cousin Ippolito is named a cardinal.
- 1533** Catherine de' Medici marries Henry, the second son of the king of France.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1534** Pope Clement VII dies.
- 1535** Ippolito de' Medici is poisoned by his cousin, Alessandro de' Medici.
- 1537** Alessandro de' Medici is assassinated; a new branch of the Medicis, under Cosimo I, takes over the rule of Florence.
- 1547** Francois I, king of France, dies; Catherine de' Medici becomes queen of France.
- 1549** Ferdinand de' Medici (who will become Ferdinand I) is born.
- 1569** Cosimo I is named the Grand Duke of Tuscany by Pope Pius V.
- 1574** Cosimo I dies and is succeeded by his son Francesco I.
- 1587** Francesco I dies and is succeeded by his brother Ferdinand I.
- 1589** Catherine de' Medici dies.
- 1590** Ferdinand I's first son, Cosimo (later named Cosimo II) is born.
- 1609** Ferdinand I dies and is succeeded by his son Cosimo II, who closes the Medici companies and bank.
- 1610** A son, who will become Ferdinand II, is born to Cosimo II.
- 1620** Cosimo II dies; until ten-year-old Ferdinand II is old enough to rule, Cosimo's mother and wife govern as regents.
- 1633** Galileo is summoned before the Inquisition; Ferdinand II drops his support of his former tutor.

CHRONØLOGY

- 1642** A son, who will become Cosimo III, is born to Ferdinand II.
- 1670** Ferdinand II dies and is succeeded by his son Cosimo III.
- 1671** Gian Gastone de' Medici is born to Cosimo III and his wife.
- 1723** Cosimo III dies; Gian Gastone takes over reign of Florence.
- 1737** Austrian troops occupy Tuscany; Gian Gastone dies on July 8, bringing an end to the reign of the Medicis over Florence.

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INDEX

- Aix-en-Provence, Giovanni de' Medici as archbishop of, 59–60
- Albizzi family, 32–35
- Alexander VI, Pope, 64, 70, 71
- Angelico, Fra, 32
- Austria
and Maria Theresa, 133
and Maximilian II, 122
and occupation of Tuscany, 131–134
- Auverne, Madeleine de la Tour d', 82–83
- Bandini, Bernardo, 8, 9, 15
- Birth of Venus, Mars and Venus* (Botticelli), 53
- Boleyn, Anne, 94
- Bologna, and Poggio plot, 47
- Botticelli, 53, 135
- Brunelleschi, Filippo
and dome of Florence's cathedral, 25, 35, 38, 40
and Foundling Hospital, 25
as imprisoned, 35
- catasto*, 29
- Catherine of Aragon, 94–95
- Charles the Bold, of Burgundy, 47
- Charles V, king of Spain, 88, 93–94, 116
- Charles VIII, king of France, 65
- Charles IX, king of France, 107, 108, 109
- Christine of Lorraine, Grand Duchess, 124, 127–128
- ciompi*, riot of, 24
- Clement VI, Pope, 116
- Clement VII, Pope, 90–95
and army retaking Florence, 92–94, 98
and Catherine de' Medici, 95, 98, 99, 100
death of, 95, 100
and forced into hiding, 91–92, 96
and Giovanni de' Medici, 119
Giulio de' Medici becoming, 89, 96
illegitimate son of. *See* Medici, Alessandro de'
and rule over Florence, 89–90
and separating Church of England from Church of Rome, 94–95
and Spanish-German army sacking Rome, 90–92
- Cosimo I. *See* Medici, Cosimo de' (Cosimo I)
- Cosimo III, 130–131
and son. *See* Medici, Gian Gastone de'
- da Vinci, Leonardo, 56
- Donatello, 32
- Duomo
and Brunelleschi constructing dome, 25, 35, 38, 40
and Pazzi Conspiracy, 1–2, 4–9, 11, 16, 19
- Edward IV, king of England, 47
- Eleanora of Toledo, 119
- Elizabeth of Austria, 109
- Elizabeth, queen of England, 109
- Elizabeth of Valois, 105
- England
Church of, 94–95
and Edward IV, 47

- and Elizabeth, 109
- and empire, 64
- and French invasion, 107
- and Henry VIII, 94–95
- Ferdinand II, 127–130
 - and Cosimo II's mother and wife as joint regents, 127–128
 - death of, 130
 - and dropping support of Galileo, 128–130
 - and son. *See* Cosimo III
 - and Urban VIII, 128
- Ferrante, King, 18
- Ferrara, and Poggio plot, 47–48
- Filippo Lippi, Fra, 32
- Florence
 - and Alessandro de' Medici abolishing republic, 93
 - and Austrian troops occupying Tuscany, 131–134
 - and Clement VII's army retaking, 92–94
 - clothing in, 28
 - and end of Medici reign, 130–134
 - and fall of noble class, 24, 35
 - and France taking, 65–66
 - and guilds, 23, 24
 - homes in, 25–27
 - and life before Renaissance, 25–28
 - and Medicis in exile, 69–73, 96–98
 - and Medicis overthrown, 34–35, 65–66, 92, 96
 - and Medicis returning to, 35–36, 70–74, 92–94, 98
 - and Pazzi Conspiracy, 4, 6, 12–15, 54
 - and Poggio plot, 47–48
 - as powerful city-state, 22–23
 - and Renaissance, 19, 28, 32, 51, 56, 130, 135
 - and Savonarola, 61, 63, 64, 70–71
 - and Siena, 119
 - and Sixtus IV declaring war on, 16, 18, 19, 54
 - and Sixtus IV excommunicating, 15–16
 - and Spain controlling, 92–94, 116
 - and Spain *versus* France, 88, 90–92
 - taxation in, 29
 - as Tuscany, 23
 - and war with Lucca, 35
 - and war with Milan, 35
 - and war with Naples, 16, 18, 54
 - and wool and silk trades, 122.
 - See also under specific Medicis*
- Foundling Hospital of Florence, 25
- France
 - and Catherine de' Medici as queen, 82, 95, 102–106
 - and Catherine de' Medici as Queen Mother, 106–109, 111
 - and Catherine de' Medici marrying Henry of Orleans, son of king, 95, 98–106
 - and Charles IX, 107, 108, 109
 - and Charles VIII, 65
 - and empire, 64
 - end of Medici power in, 115
 - and English invasion, 107
 - Florence retaken from, 70–73
 - Florence surrendering to, 65–66

INDEX

- and Francis I, 98, 100, 102
- and Francis II, 102, 105–106
- and Francois I, 82
- and Giuliano de' Medici
 - marrying aunt of king, 80
- and Guises, 106, 111
- and Henry II, 102, 106
- and Henry III, 109, 111
- and Lorenzo de' Medici
 - marrying Madeline de la Tour d'Auverne, 82
- and Lorraine, 134
- and Louis XI appointing
 - Giovanni as archbishop, 59–60
- and Louvre, 107–108, 111
- and Milan, 88
- and religious wars, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111–112, 124
- Spain *versus*, 88, 90–92
- and Tuileries, 107–108
- and Tuscany, 124.
- Francis I, king of France, 98, 100
- Francis II, king of France, 102, 105, 106
- Francois I, king of France, 82

- Galileo Galilei, 125–126, 128–130, 135
- Germany, and sacking Rome, 90–92, 96
- Giovanni de' Medici (father of Cosimo I), 119
- gonfaloniere*
 - Cosimo de' Medici as, 36–37
 - Giovanni de' Medici as, 28–29
 - and Pazzi Conspiracy, 12, 14
- Gozzoli, Benozzo, 32
- guilds, 23, 24
- Guises, 106, 111

- Hadrian VI, Pope, 89
- Henry of Navarre, 109
- Henry of Orleans
 - and love affair with Diane de Poitiers, 100–101
 - and marriage to Catherine de' Medici, 95, 98–100
- Henry II, king of France, 102
- Henry III, king of France, 109, 111
- Henry VIII, king of England, 94–95

- Innocent VIII, Pope, 60, 64
- Inquisition, and Galileo, 128

- John XXIII, Pope, 30
- Julius II, Pope
 - death of, 74
 - and Medicis retaking Florence, 70–73

- Leo X, Pope, 75, 77–80
 - and Alessandro de' Medici, 88
 - and Catherine de' Medici, 84, 87, 96
 - and Charles V, 88
 - death of, 88
 - and Florence, 77–79, 83, 87–88
 - Giovanni de' Medici
 - becoming, 75, 77
 - and Giuliano de' Medici, 77, 78, 80
 - and Giulio de' Medici, 77, 83–84
 - and Ippolito de' Medici, 88
 - and Lorenzo de' Medici, 78–79, 80, 81–82
 - and Urbino, 79–80

- Lorenzo the Magnificent. *See*
 Medici, Lorenzo de'
 Lorraine, 134
 Louvre, 107–108
 Lucca, and war with Florence, 35
- Machiavelli
 and Cosimo de' Medici, 36, 41
 and Lorenzo de' Medici, 63–64
- Marguerite of Valois, 109
- Maria Maddalena, Grand
 Duchess, 127–128
- Maria Theresa, 133
- Mary, Queen of Scots, 105
- Maximilian, Emperor of Austria,
 122
- Medici, Alessandro de', 88,
 89–90, 93
 and abolishing Florentine
 Republic, 93
 assassination of, 116, 118
 as Duke of Florence, 93, 98,
 115, 116
 and poisoning Ippolito, 116
 successors to, 118–120
 and trained to rule over
 Florence, 89–90, 92, 96
- Medici, Anna Maria Luisa, 131
- Medici, Averardo de', 24
 and son. *See* Medici, Giovanni de'
- Medici, Bianca de', 48
- Medici, Catherine de', 82–83,
 84, 89, 95–102, 104–109,
 111–112
 birth of, 82–83
 and childhood, 95–98
 and children, 82–83, 102,
 104–107, 108–109
 and Clement VII, 95, 98, 99,
 100
 in convent, 96–97
 death of, 111–112, 115, 124
 and death of father (Lorenzo,
 Duke of Urbino), 83
 and death of husband, 106
 and Ferdinand de' Medici, 124
 and granddaughter. *See*
 Christine of Lorraine, Grand
 Duchess
 and Leo X, 84, 87, 96
 and Louvre, 107–108, 111
 and marriage to Henry of
 Orleans, son of king of
 France, 95, 98–105
 and Medicis in exile, 96–98
 and Passerini, 96
 as Queen Mother, 106–109,
 111
 as queen of France, 82, 95,
 102–106, 111
 and religious wars in France,
 106, 107, 108, 109, 111–112,
 124
 in Rome, 96, 98
 and Tuileries, 107–108
- Medici, Clarice de', 70
- Medici, Cosimo de' (Cosimo I),
 119–120, 122
 as art patron, 120
 and children, 119, 122
 death of, 122
 as Grand Duke of Tuscany, 119
 and marriage, 119–120, 122
 and wool and silk trades, 120,
 122
- Medici, Cosimo de' (Cosimo II),
 125–127
 as art patron, 125
 and closing Medici companies
 and bank, 126

INDEX

- death of, 127
- and son. *See* Ferdinand II
- and supporting Galileo, 125–126
- Medici, Cosimo de' (son of Giovanni de' Medici), 30, 32–34, 35–38, 40–41, 43
- as advisor to government, 37
- Albizzi family *versus*, 32–35
- and alliance with Pope John XXIII, 30
- and arrest and imprisonment, 32
- as art patron, 32, 38, 40, 41
- as banker for Catholic Church, 30
- as banker to Florentine Republic, 37, 38, 47
- birth of, 25
- and burial in Church of San Lorenzo, 41
- as Cosimo il Vecchio, 119
- death of, 40–41
- and death of father (Giovanni), 30
- and end of reign over Florence by descendants of, 118
- as *gonfaloniere*, 36–37
- and grandson. *See* Medici, Lorenzo de'
- as head of state, 37–38, 40
- and investments and loans to foreign countries, 38, 47
- and leaving Florence, 34–35
- and legacy, 41, 43
- and Machiavelli, 36, 41
- and Medici Palace, 30, 32, 33, 38, 40
- and number of years ruling Florence, 40
- as *Pater Patriae* ("Father of his Country"), 41
- and return to Florence, 35–36
- and sons, 40. *See also* Medici, Piero de'
- and villas for family, 32, 40
- Medici, Ferdinand de' (Ferdinand I), 123–125
- Medici, Francis de' (Francis I), 122–123, 124
- Medici, Gian Gastone de', 131–134
- Medici, Giovanni de', 23–30
- and banking guild, 23, 24–25, 28
- birth of, 23
- death of, 30
- family of, 23, 24
- as *gonfaloniere*, 28–29
- and just tax, 29
- and marriage, 25
- and public works, 25, 28
- and simple life, 25–28
- and sons. *See* Medici, Cosimo de'; Medici, Lorenzo de' (Lorenzo the Magnificent)
- Medici, Giovanni de' (son of Cosimo de' Medici), 40
- Medici, Giovanni de' (son of Lorenzo), 59–60
- as archbishop of Aix-en-Provence, 59–60
- in exile from Florence, 69–70
- Lorenzo's view of, 61
- as Pope. *See* Leo X, Pope
- and retaking Florence, 73
- in Rome, 70, 74
- as youngest cardinal in history, 60, 70

INDEX

- Medici, Giuliano de' (son of Cosimo de' Medici)
 and assassination, 1–2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8–9, 11, 19, 54
 and Cosimo de' Medici's legacy, 41, 43
 illegitimate son of. *See* Medici, Giulio de' (illegitimate son of Giuliano de' Medici)
 in Medici Palace, 40
 and spectacles in Florence, 51, 53
- Medici, Giuliano de' (son of Lorenzo de' Medici), 74–75
 death of, 80
 in exile from Florence, 66, 69–70
 and Leo X, 77, 78, 80
 Lorenzo's view of, 61
 and marriage, 80
 and move to Rome, 78
 and retaking Florence, 73–74
- Medici, Giulio de' (illegitimate son of Giuliano de' Medici), 83–84
 as administrator of Florence, 83–84
 in exile from Florence, 69–70
 Ippolito, Alessandro, and Catherine de' Medici living with, 88
 and Leo X, 77, 83–84
 as pope. *See* Clement VII, Pope
 and retaking Florence, 73–74
 in Rome, 70
- Medici, Ippolito de', 88, 89–90
 as cardinal, 116
 and Catherine de' Medici, 98
 and poisoned by Alessandro, 116
 and trained to rule over Florence, 89–90, 92, 96
- Medici, Lorenzo de' (Lorenzo the Magnificent), 49–51, 53–56, 59–61, 63–64
 and alliance with Venice and Milan, 54
 and art patron, 51, 55, 56, 60
 and assassination attempt, 1–2, 4–9, 11, 16, 54
 birth of, 25
 and children, 56, 59–61, 69.
See also Medici, Giovanni de'; Medici, Giuliano de'; Medici, Piero de'
 and Cosimo de' Medici's legacy, 41, 43
 death of, 63–64
 and death of father (Piero), 2, 50
 and dominating Florentine life, 54–56
 and engagement, 49–50
 as "Lorenzo the Magnificent," 54
 and Machiavelli, 63–64
 and marriage, 50
 in Naples negotiating peace, 16, 18, 54
 and Pazzi Conspiracy, 1–2, 4–9, 11–16, 18–19, 54, 56
 and poetry, 53
 and Savonarola, 61, 63
 and Sixtus IV declaring war on Florence in, 16, 18, 19
 and Sixtus IV seizing Imola, 53–54
 and spectacles in Florence, 51, 53
 as statesman, 55–56

INDEX

- Medici, Lorenzo de' (son of Piero de' Medici), 70, 74–75, 80–81
 and daughter. *See* Medici, Catherine de'
 death of, 83
 as Duke of Urbino, 80, 81–82
 in exile from Florence, 73
 and Giulio de' Medici, 83–84
 as leader of Florence, 78–79, 81
 and Leo X, 78–79, 80, 81–82
 and marriage, 82–83
- Medici, Lucrezia de', 49
- Medici, Nannina de', 48
- Medici, Piccarda Bueri (wife of Giovanni), 25
- Medici, Piero de' (son of Cosimo), 47–50
 as banker, 47
 and children, 48. *See also* Medici, Giuliano de'; Medici, Lorenzo de' (Lorenzo the Magnificent)
 death of, 2, 50
 and death of father (Cosimo), 40–41, 43
 in Medici Palace, 40
 and Poggio plot, 47–48
 and suffering from gout, 46
- Medici, Piero de' (son of Lorenzo de' Medici), 61, 64–66
 children of, 70. *See also* Medici, Lorenzo de' (son of Piero de' Medici)
 death of, 70
 and death of father (Lorenzo), 83
 in exile from Florence, 66, 69–70
 Lorenzo's view of, 61, 64
 and marriage, 56
 and surrendering to French army, 65–66, 74–75
- Medici, Pietro de', and son. *See* Medici, Lorenzo de' (son of Pietro)
- Medici, Salvestro de' (cousin of Giovanni de' Medici), 24
- Medici, Salvestro de' (grandfather of Giovanni de' Medici), 24
- Medici family
 Albizzi family *versus*, 32–35
 as bankers, 24
 and Cosimo II as final banker of, 126
 and decline in power, 122–134
 and end of reign over Florence, 130–134
 in exile from Florence, 66, 69–73, 96–98
 in France. *See* Catherine de' Medici
 homes of. *See* Medici Palace; Pitti Palace
 and legacy, 134–135
 and length of reign in Florence, 19
 as overthrown, 34–35, 65–66, 92, 96
 and returning to Florence, 35–36, 70–74, 92–94.
See also specific Medici family members
- Medici Palace, 30, 32, 33, 38, 40, 135
- Michelangelo, 56, 80, 135

- Milan, 23, 88
 - and France invading Florence, 65
 - Lorenzo de' Medici forming alliance with, 54
 - and Poggio plot, 48
 - and war with Florence, 35
- Montesecco, 6, 8, 9
- Naples, 23
 - and Cosimo de' Medici stabilizing threat to Florence, 38
 - and invasion of Tuscany, 16
 - and Lorenzo de' Medici negotiating peace, 16, 18, 54
 - and Piero de' Medici, 65
 - Sixtus IV forming alliance with, 54
- Orsini family, 49
 - and Lorenzo de' Medici marrying Clarice, 49–50
 - and Piero de' Medici marrying Alfonsina, 56
- palle*, 14
- Passerini, Cardinal, 89, 90, 96
- Pazzi Conspiracy, 1–2, 4–9, 11–16, 18–19, 54
 - and assassinating Giuliano, 1–2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8–9, 11, 19, 54
 - and assassination attempt on Lorenzo de' Medici, 1–2, 4–9, 11, 16
 - and attempted control of Florence, 4, 6, 12–16, 54
 - and marriage of Lorenzo de' Medici's daughters, 56
 - and war on Florence, 16, 18, 19, 54
- Pazzi, Francesco de', 1, 8–9, 14
- Pazzi, Jacopo de', 6, 13–14, 14–15
- Philiberte of Savoy, 80
- Philip II, king of Spain, 105–106
- Pisa, 22
 - and Salviati family member as archbishop, 5–6
- Pistoia, 22
- Pitti Palace, 131, 135
- Pius V, Pope, 119
- Poggios, and plot against Medicis and Florence, 47–48
- Prato, 22
 - Julius II's troops overtaking, 72–73
- Protestantism, and France, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111–112
- Renaissance, 19, 28, 32, 51, 56, 130, 135
- Return of Spring* (Botticelli), 53
- Riario, Girolamo, 4, 5
- Riario, Rafaello, Cardinal, 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15
- Rome
 - and bubonic plague, 92
 - pope and banks in, 5
 - Spanish-German army sacking, 90–92, 96
- Rovere, Francesco della, 81–82
- Salvati, Francesco, Archbishop, 5–6, 8, 12, 14, 16
- San Lorenzo, Church of, 38
 - Cosimo de' Medici buried in, 41
 - Giuliano de' Medici buried in, 80

INDEX

- San Marco, monastery of, 32, 38
- Savonarola, Girolamo, Father, 61, 63, 64, 70–71
- Siena
and Florence, 119
and invasion of Tuscany, 16
- Signoria
and Alessandro de' Medici abolishing Florentine Republic, 93
and Cosimo de' Medici as *gonfaloniere*, 36–37
and Cosimo de' Medici as *Pater Patriae*, 41
and Giovanni de' Medici as *gonfaloniere*, 28–29
and Lorenzo de' Medici, 55
and Piero de' Medici, 66
and Poggio plot, 48
and Savonarola, 71
- Signoria, Palazzo della
Cosimo de' Medici imprisoned in, 34
Pazzi Conspiracy attack on, 12–15
- Sixtus IV, Pope
and alliance with Naples, 54
and assassination of Giuliano de' Medici, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8–9, 11
and attempted assassination of Lorenzo de' Medici, 1–2, 4–9, 11–16
and attempted takeover of Florence, 4, 12–16
death of, 60
and excommunicating Florence, 15–16
and Pazzi Conspiracy, 1–2, 4–9, 11–16, 18–19
and seizing Imola, 53
and war on Florence, 16, 18
- Spain
and Charles V, 88, 93–94, 116
and control of Florence, 92–94, 116
and empire, 64
and Florence, 92–94
France *versus* over Italy, 88, 90–92
and Hadrian VI, 89
and Philip II, 105–106
and sacking Rome, 90–92, 96
and Tuscany, 124
- Tuilleries, 107
- Turkey, and Italian invasion, 18
- Tuscany, Florence as, 23
- Uffizi, 120, 123, 135
- Urban VIII, Pope, 128
- Urbino
Leo X attacking, 79–80
and Lorenzo de' Medici as Duke of, 80, 81–82
and Rovere as Duke of, 81–82
- Venice, 23, 24
and Cosimo de' Medici stabilizing threat to Florence, 38
Lorenzo de' Medici forming alliance with, 54
and Poggio plot, 47–48
- Vienna, Peace of, 132–134
- Vittoria, Grand Duchess, 130
- Volterra, 22

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